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Abstract

In Shi ji studies, scholars from both the East and West have predominantly taken one particular approach: the psychological reading of its author, Sima Qian. Since the author suffered penal castration when he was writing the Shi ji, this approach has been summarized as “the theory of conveying one’s frustration.” Many scholars, modern and pre-modern alike, have inferred the author’s feelings and emotions from his biographical experiences and have interpreted the text accordingly. This narrow interpretation constrains our understanding by exclusively focusing on the author’s personal pains and purposes. Such analysis thus commits the intentional fallacy, which mistakenly equates the author with the text, unjustifiably simplifying the complicated interpretive process. I explore the features of the text itself, shifting the focus of research from the author’s intention to the effects produced by its narrative devices, which have determinative influence over the interpretive process but have long been overlooked. I explore the role of narrative as a medium in historical works, applying theories of narratology from the French Structuralist Gérard Genette to analyze narratives in the Shi ji. By setting the text into this framework, I systematically examine the narrative sequences, such as anticipation and flashback, narrative duration and mood, and characterization. My investigation shows that these narrative devices produce literary effects, distinguishing Shi ji from both earlier and later histories, such as the Zuo zhuan and Han shu. Shi ji presents a highly complicated past by manipulating interrelations among historical events, regulating information, and emphasizing changes and their effects. It pays most attention to how the historical events happened, more than what happened and why, a significant issue has not been discussed in a context of Chinese historiography. My narratological approach provides an alternative perspective and explores new territory in Shi ji studies.

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BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY:
A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *SHI JI*

Lei Yang

A DISSERTATION

in

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

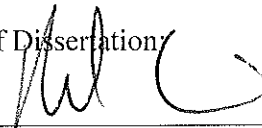
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BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY:

A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *SHI JI*

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Lei Yang

To my family: Yongbai and Guoyan, who always believe in me and
encourage me to follow my passion

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ABSTRACT**BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY:
A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *SHI JI***

Lei Yang

Paul R. Goldin

In *Shi ji* studies, scholars from both the East and West have predominantly taken one particular approach: the psychological reading of its author, Sima Qian. Since the author suffered penal castration when he was writing the *Shi ji*, this approach has been summarized as “the theory of conveying one’s frustration.” Many scholars, modern and pre-modern alike, have inferred the author’s feelings and emotions from his biographical experiences and have interpreted the text accordingly. This narrow interpretation constrains our understanding by exclusively focusing on the author’s personal pains and purposes. Such analysis thus commits the intentional fallacy, which mistakenly equates the author with the text, unjustifiably simplifying the complicated interpretive process. I explore the features of the text itself, shifting the focus of research from the author’s intention to the effects produced by its narrative devices, which have determinative

influence over the interpretive process but have long been overlooked. I explore the role of narrative as a medium in historical works, applying theories of narratology from the French Structuralist Gérard Genette to analyze narratives in the *Shi ji*. By setting the text into this framework, I systematically examine the narrative sequences, such as anticipation and flashback, narrative duration and mood, and characterization. My investigation shows that these narrative devices produce literary effects, distinguishing *Shi ji* from both earlier and later histories, such as the *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*. *Shi ji* presents a highly complicated past by manipulating interrelations among historical events, regulating information, and emphasizing changes and their effects. It pays most attention to *how* the historical events happened, more than *what* happened and *why*, a significant issue has not been discussed in a context of Chinese historiography. My narratological approach provides an alternative perspective and explores new territory in *Shi ji* studies.

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INTRODUCTION

In the reign of Emperor Cheng (r. 32- 7 B.C.) one of the Han princes, Prince Dongping, came to the capital, Chang'an, and asked the emperor whether he can receive copies of philosophical works and the *Taishigong shu* 太史公書 (i.e., *Shi ji* 史記, Records of the Historian). At that time, *Shi ji* was not widely circulated. Unfortunately, his requests were both declined, because the emperor consulted one of his high ministers. When the minister explained why *Shi ji* could not be given to the prince, his reason was: the *Shi ji* records “the wily and expedient schemes of the diplomats of the warring states period, the unusual measures resorted to by the advisors at the time of the founding of the Han, and all the strange occurrences in the realm of the heavens, the strategic points in the territorial lords.”¹ Thus, according to such a view, *Shi ji* could constitute a real danger to the ruling house. But why, as a historical work, could it pose a threat and how could this effect be produced? This study will give an answer to this question from a structural perspective.

Shi ji is a fascinating historical work which has enjoyed an extremely wide readership in China, Japan, Korean and other countries in the world during the past two millennia. Due to the great amount of research done by generations of scholars since the book was completed by the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145?-86 B.C.E.) and perhaps his father Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 B.C.E.), *Shi ji* studies have formed an important subfield

¹ *Han shu* 80, 3324-25.

in research on pre-modern China. It can generally be divided into a few fields, including textual, philosophical, historical, and literary studies. Among them, history and literature are two camps that particularly relate to my dissertation because of the perspectives from which they read the *Shi ji*.

The history camp aims to test and verify the contents of *Shi ji* by comparing it with other extant historical texts, or with archeological findings. The literature camp reads it as the work of an author, such as imagination, his emotion, and experience. Scholars in this camp appreciate its beautiful language and vivid individualized characters. Many of them even use the life experience of Sima Qian directly to interpret the contents of *Shi ji*. A number of significant questions that both camps attempt to solve are about the author's intentions: why Sima Qian wrote such a magnificent work, why we have such a chapter, paragraph, even a certain sentence or a word selected in the *Shi ji*, why he used such an innovative structure and so on. The results of this research are contradictory. It is not unusual for scholars to find opposite evidence and use it to draw contrary conclusions.

I approach the study of *Shi ji* using a radically different methodology. I do not try to read the work on the basis of Sima Qian's personal experience, an approach that would fall into the category of the intentional fallacy² and does not lead to defensible inferences about the work. Instead, I use narrative analysis to investigate *how* the *Shi ji* produces

² W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry." Also see Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*.

meanings. It allows me to explore how narrating action impacts the meaning of the text, instead of speculating about authorial intention, and to avoid the heavy influence of previous readers. In doing so, I also am able to interpret the work comprehensively rather than picking among the so-called useful but specific evidence to make a general argument. What *Shi ji* studies need is not another interpretation of the author's thought but how the text speaks for itself.

The question I ask is not "What did Sima Qian really mean or what did he intend to mean?" but rather "*How* does the text produce meaning? What are the functions of its rhetoric and narrative? How are the characters sculpted?" Therefore I explore the narratives, characters, and their roles in conveying the meaning.

My purpose is twofold. First, I want to create some distance between the author and the text, showing that an author does not fully control the production of meaning. Author, text and reader interact in a highly complicated way. By using a narrative approach, I do not connect the *Shi ji* text with the portrait of Sima Qian, which is the result of numerous readers and an over-reading of two pieces of writing attributed to him. Instead, I view the *Shi ji* as a text generated by a narrating action of a historian. Thus I neither link the historian's personal life nor his motivation to his narration of the text. Instead, I establish connections between the narrative devices and its outcome in the current text. As a result, the narrated events and the text itself are the primary materials for my study. The highly limited available information about Sima Qian will not be used

to interpret the text. Moreover, I want to explore why readers have been attracted by the various characters in the *Shi ji*. Aside from its historical value, it is interesting to read even though it does not present a simple, neat historical pattern. My work shows how the aspects of the narrating action impacted the link between events and their representations.

Many scholars consider narrative as essentially a mode of (verbal) presentation and define their task as the study of narrative discourse rather than story. Gérard Genette (b. 1930) is one among them. Analysis of narrative discourse for him is “a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating.”³ The goal of his book, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*, was to generalize some common rules that are followed by all narratives. He found that order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice are necessary for all narratives. This means that to tell a sequence of events, no matter whether historical or fictive, these five aspects cannot be avoided: the order of the events, the duration of the events and the space the narrator used to describe them, the frequency of presenting an event, the distance and vision of the narration, and the mode of action of the verb considered for relations to the subject.

A large proportion of the *Shi ji* consists of narratives. Many of the chapters build up a discourse of narratives. This study not only examines the five aspects of narratives proposed by Genette, but also how they direct the meaning, characterization, and rhetoric

³ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 29.

of the *Shi ji*. I concentrate on three questions: 1) what are the differences between narrative and story? 2) How does the *Shi ji* achieve representation of the story? 3) What are the functions of the narrative devices in the *Shi ji*? This method provides me with tools to examine the way *Shi ji* produces meanings.

In this dissertation, I will follow some terms used by Genette in his book.

I propose, without insisting on the obvious reasons for my choice of terms, to use the word *story* for the signified or narrative content (even if this content turns out, in a given case, to be low in dramatic intensity or fullness of incident), to use the word *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word *narrating* for the producing narrative action, and by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place.⁴

The introduction of the three terms clarifies some easily confusing and interrelated definitions. As a result, the *Shi ji* text, largely in the form of narratives, tells stories of the past, and it is the result of the narration of the past.

1. Previous *Shi ji* Studies:

Shi ji has attracted scholarly attention worldwide over the past two millennia for many reasons. The three most important are: first, it has unusually significant weight in Chinese history. Burton Watson compared *Shi ji* and its weight to the *History* of Herodotus in the West.⁵ *Shi ji* is the first comprehensive history which covers from the

⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 27.

⁵ Watson, vii.

Yellow Emperor⁶ to Sima Qian's own time. Many of its data, such as the genealogy of Shang Kings and records of historical wars, have been verified by archeological findings. *Shi ji* has been an indispensable manual for anyone who would like to know pre-modern China. For anything that happened before 112 B.C.E., *Shi ji* is probably the first primary source one would go to. Its significance partly comes from its innovations. For example, although the book borrows some features from earlier historical works, this is the first that uses a biographical form. This form particularly became a dominant genre for historical writings and was borrowed in the literature of imperial times. Another example is that its five-section structure was borrowed and adjusted by many later historians.

In order to explain the second reason that many frustrated scholars appreciate *Shi ji*, I will introduce the postface of *Shi ji*, the Li Ling incident, and the "Letter in Reply to Ren An." The 130th chapter of the *Shiji*, the postface, covers many significant themes. At the beginning, it views the history of the Sima lineage. They claim a tradition of serving as historians in the court of the Zhou dynasty. A very short introduction about Sima Qian's father Sima Tan is followed by Sima Tan's well-known essay, the "Essentials of Six Schools" ("Liu jia yao zhi" 六家要指). After that comes the admonition of the bedridden father to his son:

⁶ A legendary sagely ruler. He was one of the five sagely emperors in the *Shi ji*.

余先周室之太史也。自上世嘗顯功名於虞夏，典天官事。後世中衰，絕於予乎？汝復為太史，則續吾祖矣。……余死，汝必為太史；為太史，無忘吾所欲論著矣。⁷

“Our ancestors were the Grand historians of the Zhou house. Since the predecessors once manifested their merits and reputations during the reign of Shun and in the Xia dynasty, they were responsible for astrological matters. Later generations declined halfway. Will [the tradition] go extinct with me? [If] you become the Grand Historian again, then continue (the work) our ancestors. … After I die, you are sure to become the Grand Historian. When you become the Grand Historian, do not forget what I have desired to expound and write.”

It then moves on to a conversation between Sima Qian and his contemporary Hu Sui 壺遂⁸, regarding the relationship between the *Shi ji* and the *Chun qiu* 春秋 (*Annals of Spring and Autumn*). Many scholars consider this conversation a veiled expression of Sima Qian’s intentions.⁹ After that, the structure of the *Shi ji* is presented chapter by chapter. Because of these strikingly significant themes, the postface is traditionally considered one of the most significant texts whereby Sima Qian’s intentions of the *Shi ji* can be examined.

⁷ See *SJ* 130.

⁸ Hu Sui served in the feudal state of Liang 梁 and acquired a widely acknowledged reputation as an official. Together with Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 and Sima Qian, in 105 B.C.E., Hu Sui pointed out that the calendar was in need of adjustment. As a result, the *Taichu* 太初 calendar was introduced with the effect from 104 B.C.E. See Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC-AD 24)*, 161.

⁹ While scholars use this conversation to infer Sima Qian’s intention, they have different arguments regarding what exactly the intentions are. Li Shaoyong claims that Sima Qian, like Confucius, intended to stimulate and satire (*ciji* 刺譏). See *Sima Qian zhuanji wenxue lungao*, 21. Durrant’s argues that Sima Qian was and intended to be a second Confucius partially relies on this conversation. See *Cloudy Mirror*, 62-65. Watson’s position stands somewhere between Li and Durrant. He believes that Sima Qian intended to show that his work is similar to and different from Confucius’ work at the same time. See *Ssu-ma Ch’ien*, 90.

Two sources regarding the Li Ling incident are “The Biographies of Li Guang and Su Jian” in the *Han shu* and the “Letter in Reply to Ren An.”¹⁰ Li Ling had led an expedition against the Xiongnu 匈奴 and was defeated by them at Junji 浚稽 in the preceding year. Sima Qian, based on his observation and analysis of Li Ling and his military activities, defended him, noting that he had spared no effort to fight against the Xiongnu. Sima Qian also pointed out to Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 140-87 B.C.E.) that the defeat came because the Nisean General¹¹, Li Guangli 李廣利, did not lead his relief column to support Li Ling. However, the Emperor Wu believed that Sima Qian was slandering Li Guangli, who was the elder brother of Emperor Wu’s favorite concubine. Therefore Sima Qian was charged with the crime of *wuwang* 誣罔 or prevarication and deceit, and sentenced to castration. This was an exceptionally humiliating punishment, since it destroyed the ability to carry on the family line. The event is known as the Li Ling incident.

As for the “Letter Reply to Ren An,” many Chinese scholars have believed it to be an authentic letter from Sima Qian to his old friend, the official Ren An 任安 (d. 91 B.C.E.?).¹² This letter is preserved in two early texts, the “Biography of Sima Qian”

¹⁰ For a translation of the letter by Hightower, see *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 95-102.

¹¹ Nisean horse is an extinct horse breed, once native to the two of Nisaia, located in the Nisean Plain in Iran. Emperor Wu sent the Li Guangli’s army to get some horses. Therefore, the general’s title was named after this breed of horse.

¹² See my review of the scholarship of the literary camp in the 1.2 section.

(Sima Qian zhuan 司馬遷傳) in the *Han shu* 漢書¹³, and the *Wen xuan* 文選.¹⁴ Xun Yue 荀悅 (148-209) also cites a long portion of this letter in the *Han ji* 漢紀. The letter was not included in the *Shiji*.¹⁵ From this letter, we know that Sima Qian once received a letter from Ren An, requesting him to *tuixian jinshi* “推賢進士” (recommend the talents and advance the gentleman).¹⁶ When the “Letter to Ren An” was composed, Ren An had already been arrested and there was a possibility of his being punished with death.

The second reason *Shi ji* enjoys a large readership is that Sima Qian’s frustrating, humiliating personal life and his indomitable spirit have aroused sympathy in numerous readers. In “A Letter in Reply to Ren An” (dated in 91B.C.E.),¹⁷ we learn that Sima Qian was sentenced to death at first, but later the punishment was commuted to castration. Because *Shi ji* was not yet completed, he determined to devote the rest of life to this book.¹⁸ Many frustrated scholarly officials and literati in pre-modern China viewed *Shi ji* as an exemplar of devotion to writing. A literary theory in the postface and the

¹³ See *Hanshu*, 62.2725-36.

¹⁴ See *Wenxuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 41.1854-66.

¹⁵ David Knechtges suspects that because of the letter’s highly sensitive content, the “Letter to Ren An” was not known until after Sima Qian’s death. Thus, despite of its autobiographical nature, he did not include it in the *Shiji*. However, it is interesting to note that the *Shi ji* also did not circulate until after Sima Qian’s death. It is explicitly written in the *Shi ji* that it is waiting to be read by the noblemen in the posterity. Thus, Knechtges’ explanation partially explicates its absence in the *Shiji*, but is not completely convincing. For Knechtges’ argument, see “‘Key words,’ Authorial Intent, and Interpretation: Sima Qian’s Letter to Ren An”. *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol. 30 (Dec., 2008), 77.

¹⁶ The goal of the letter from Ren An is not explicitly stated. The phrase *tuixian jin shi* was traditionally believed to be an euphemism of asking Sima to persuade Emperor Wu to release Ren An.

¹⁷ A letter attributed to Sima Qian to another official at court called Ren An. I will discuss this letter in detail in the next section in this chapter.

¹⁸ See the “Letter in Reply to Ren An.”

“Biography of Qu Yuan and Master Jia,”¹⁹ briefly summarized here, is that good writings come out of their authors’ frustration.

The third reason for *Shi ji*’s wide readership is that it is an interesting book. It does preach to its reader sometimes, but there are numerous dramatic narratives which attract a reader’s emotions and attention. Not only for scholars but also for common readers, *Shi ji* is fun to read. Direct quotations from characters, secret conversations, songs and poems are easy to find. All sorts of protagonists interact in it, from emperors, generals, and ministers to women, assassins, jesters, fortune-tellers. They laugh, cry, rise and decline in this book. I discuss the diversity of characters in detail in Chapter 2.

These three reasons and many others account for its popularity over the past two thousand years. Enormous scholarship on the *Shi ji* covers different aspects, such as textual, philosophical, historical and literary studies, etc. Among them, the last two are of intimate relation to my argument. A full treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of my study, but given its importance to the history of the *Shiji*, it is crucial to mention some major scholarship in two camps: history and literature.

¹⁹ *SJ* 84.

1.1 *Shi ji*: A Historical Record by a Historian

One group of early critics, represented by the litterateurs Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.) and Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.E.), commented on the accuracy of *Shi ji*.

Yang Xiong, in the preface to the *Fa yan* 法言 (*Model sayings*), that:

或問：“周官？”曰：“立事。”“左氏？”曰：“品藻。”“太史遷？”曰：“實錄。”²⁰

Someone asked, “The *Offices of Zhou*?” [I] said, “It established procedures.” “Master Zuo?” [I] said, “He judged and evaluated.” “The Grand Historian Qian?” [I] said, “[He] faithfully recorded.”

This comment was later elaborated in the *Han shu*.

然自劉向、揚雄博極群書，皆稱遷有良史之材，服其善序事理，辯而不華，質而不俚，其文直，其事核，不虛美，不隱惡，故謂之實錄。²¹

However, since Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong broadly examined the multitude of books, they both praised Qian as having the talent of an excellent historian. They testify his talents of putting events and their causes in order, being critically acute but not flowery, substantial but not vulgar. His writing is direct, his events are verifiable. He did not make the glory empty, nor cover up the wickedness. Therefore, they called [his work] faithfully recorded.

A second group, represented by the historians Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) and his father Ban Biao 班彪 (3-54), were more concerned about the relationship between *Shi ji* and the ancient classics. They not only commented on *Shi ji* and Sima Qian but also initiated their own project, *Han Shu* (*History of the Former Han* 漢書) which goes from the Qin-Han

²⁰ *Fa yan yishu*, juan 10, 413.

²¹ *HS* 62. 2738.

transition down to Ban Gu's own time. In the "Biography of Sima Qian" in this book, Ban Gu, criticized Sima Qian for failing to accord with the Sages and moral righteousness.

其言秦漢，詳矣。至於采經摭傳，分散數家之事，甚多疏略，或有抵牾。亦其涉獵者廣博，貫穿經傳，馳騁古今，上下數千載間，斯以勤矣。又其是非頗繆於聖人，論大道則先黃老而後六經，序遊俠則退處士而進姦雄，述貨殖則崇勢利而羞賤貧，此其所蔽也。²²

[*Shi ji*'s] words about Qin and Han are very detailed. When it comes to citing the classics and selecting among their traditions, it divided and scattered [the teachings] of several schools. Many matters are neglected or sketchily discussed; sometimes it has contradictions. Also, it covered and mentioned in a broad and large scale, went through classics and their traditions, galloped freely through the ancient times and these days in thousands of years. Therefore, he was diligent. His comments about right and wrong are considerably against those of the sages. When discussing the great ways, [he gives] the Huang-Lao lineage priority over the Six Classics. When he organized 'Wandering Warriors,' he gave precedence over worthy recluses and promoted scheming careerists. In narrating 'Commerce and Trade,' he honored those who were wealthy while scorning the poor and humble. These are his blind spots.

The third group, unlike Ban Gu and his father, focused on the role of Sima Qian as a historian. The Tang historian, Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721), represents these scholars. Acknowledging Sima Qian's talent, he criticized several aspects of the *Shi ji*, including which figures deserved to be recorded, in what order they should have been listed, and what essential sources Sima Qian failed to use.²³ By comparing the biographical form

²² Ibid, 2737.

²³ *Shi tong tongshi*,juan 2, 1b-4b..

with the chronology, he focused on the drawbacks resulting from employing the biographical form. Due to this way of organizing materials, political events about the same hereditary family or state are distributed in a number of chapters, further leading to the redundancy of *Shi ji*.²⁴ He also doubted the veracity of the narratives in the *Shi ji* and argued that these materials must be fabricated and should not be included in historical writings like *Shi ji*.²⁵ The comments by Liu Zhiji in his *Shi tong* suggest that he did not recognize the benefits of five genres correspondingly used in five sections in the *Shi ji*, which I discuss in Chapter 2.

This tendency of pursuing accuracy later developed into a singular sect called the studies of *kaozheng* 考證 or *kaoju xue* 考據學, meaning evidentiary learning. Scholars such as Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1716-1792) and Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 (1865-1946) are representatives²⁶: the accuracy of the dates and events in the *Shi ji* were their primary concern. They aimed to reconstruct the historical facts described in the *Shi ji* by comparing it with other received texts. The huge debate about whether the *Shi ji* is reliable continues to this day.

However, recently Paul R. Goldin tends to focus on why historical facts are distorted. He maintains that “ancient Chinese thinkers, at least until Sima Qian 司馬遷

²⁴ Ibid, *juan* 1, 18b-20a.

²⁵ Ibid, *juan* 20. Liu listed several examples in the *Shi ji*, including the “Basic Annals of the Five Emperors,” “Biographies of Jesters,” “Hereditary House of Tian Jing” and many others.

²⁶ Liang Yusheng’s *Shi ji zhiyi* 史記志疑 and Takigawa Kametarō’s *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 attempt to correct the mistakes in the *Shi ji*.

(145?-86? B.C.E.)—and possibly even later—did not approve or disapprove of statements about history according to how well they fit what we would call facts. Rather, they valued statements about the past that embodied what *should* have been true, regardless of whether they embodied what *was* true. History was expected to be edifying, not necessarily factual.”²⁷ He goes on to argue that this is not because accuracy is not a concern of these historians, but that they considered moral truth more important than factual truth. Nevertheless, Sima Qian “represents something of a watershed”²⁸ in that he was the first historian in China to be concerned about his sources. He noted that Sima Qian also used myths and has been criticized for inserting his emotions into his writing and therefore could not be impartial all the time; he did, however, introduce “a new historical consciousness by observing that sources must be handled critically when they are contradicted by other sources.”²⁹

Indeed, tracing the study of *Shi ji* and Sima Qian in the West, it was initiated by French sinologist, Édouard Chavannes (1865-1918). Although he enjoyed reading the *Shi ji* as a piece of literature, especially the vivid characters described in the biographical section, Chavannes’s research treated it as a historiographical work. He wrote that “their images [of the famous men of yesterday] are evoked before our eyes’ that their ashes are made to live again... The Chinese read these chapters (biographical chapters) as we

²⁷ See Goldin, “Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric.”

²⁸ Ibid, 90.

²⁹ Ibid, 91.

French read our rich literature of memoirs, to rediscover in them the personalities of those who have played some role in the grand comedy in one-hundred diverse acts.”³⁰ He discussed a number of basic questions in the “Introduction” chapter in *Les Mémoires historiques*, including “the lives of the authors and their role in the compilation of the text, of interpolations, the historical background, sources, methodology, and the influence of the work on subsequent writings.”³¹

Like Chavanees, Grant Hardy also notes some literary features of the *Shi ji*, but his study mainly explores this text from a historical point of view. The approach of reading the autobiographical chapter is limited for several reasons, according to Hardy. His thesis is that, Sima Qian “used the microcosmic *Shiji* as a tool for gaining understanding and wisdom... For Sima Qian, *Shiji* is a mode of self-expression and a road to immortality.”³² “Through the microcosmic structure of the *Shiji*, he creates a model that gives shape to the world at large. He invites us to enter his model and join him in using it to make sense of history... He has secured for himself a perpetual place in histories that will be conceived and written for ten thousand generations to come.”³³

As Esther Klein has pointed out, “Hardy credits Sima Qian with almost superhuman subtlety and sophistication: he assumes that Sima Qian intentionally

³⁰ Ibid, 4. See *Les Mémoires historique* [clxxv]. My Translation is based on Nienhauser’s in his “Century,” 4.

³¹ Nienhauser, “Century,” 4.

³² Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo*, 209.

³³ Ibid, 212.

conceived his work exactly as it appears today in order to serve as a pedagogical tool for readers. There is room for doubt on this point.” It is true that Hardy used more materials, especially some chapters which had not been paid attention to, instead of limiting himself to the postface and the “Letter in Reply to Ren An.” However, Hardy’s study was still devoted to Sima Qian’s intentions regarding the form and functions of *Shi ji*. He merely used more materials to speculate about the motivation and goal of Sima Qian. In addition, the question of whether Sima Qian is Confucian or Daoist has haunted many studies of *Shi ji*.

1.2 Perspective from Literature

While there are many scholars who analyze *Shi ji* from a historical perspective, it has long been considered an exemplar of prose writing. However, because of its significance in historical studies, the literary features of *Shi ji* are not paid enough attention. Scholars listed below often view it as a piece of work by an author who happened to be a frustrated historian. Their readings are generally based on the postface and the “Letter in Reply to Ren An.”

While the high quality of writings in the *Shi ji* had already been noticed by earlier scholars, such as Ban Gu and Zhang Fu 張輔 (d. ca. 306), it was the Ancient-style Prose Movement in the Tang that consolidated and promoted the status of *Shi ji*. Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) were two influential figures in the Tang

who advocated its style and pointed out that it was worthy of imitating. The goal of this movement was to transform the style of parallel prose, which overemphasized the rigid structure and ornate function at the expense of content. Therefore ancient style prose in the pre-imperial period and in Qin-Han times used by various philosophers became exemplars. “These projects involved the creation of a new literary canon, and Sima Qian had a secure, if not especially central, place in that canon.”³⁴ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), in the Northern Song is another scholar who recognizes Sima Qian’s talents in writing. In the realm of prose style, “he not only expressed his admiration for Sima Qian but explicitly aimed to imitate him.”³⁵ In his “Traditions of Sang Yi” 桑懌傳,³⁶ he wrote that Qian’s writing of biographies are sublime and touching, and that he was not sure his biography of Sang Yi could produce the same effects.

Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1608-1661), well known as a critic of later fiction, represents a group of late imperial scholars who tended to read the *Shi ji* word by word and infer Sima Qian’s emotions, thoughts, and intentions at the moment when he wrote that word or paragraph down. He also make connections among different places in the text and interpret why these places were written and structured in a certain way. Although Jin did not leave a complete book to collect his comments on *Shi ji*, the *Talents’ Ancient Texts* (*Caizi guwen* 才子古文) collected his comments on more than 90 instances of

³⁴ Klein, “The History of A Historian,” 96.

³⁵ Ibid, 107.

³⁶ Ouyang Xiu *Quanjì* 66. 971-72.

comments introduced by *Taishigong yue* 太史公曰 (The grand historian says) at the end of many *Shi ji* chapters.

On the one hand, some of his interpretations inspire readers to reconstruct the role of the author. His discussion on the relation between *Shi ji* and later fiction is one of Jin's important contributions. While he pointed out the difference between historiography and fiction, meanwhile he recognized that the many works of fiction borrowed literary techniques from the *Shi ji*. A historian has to work out an essay on the basis of historical events, whereas the authors of pseudo-historical fiction like the *Water Margin* 水滸傳 by Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (1296-1372) have more freedom to make their accounts interesting and had borrowed some writing techniques from *Shi ji*. On the other hand, the foundation of his analysis regarding the relation between Sima Qian and his writing is problematic. Jin Shengtan was aware of the fact that the authors of both the fiction and history, to some degree, have some freedom in presenting plots and characterization, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 1.

Zhang Dake 張大可 (1940-) has studied broad aspects of *Shi ji*, such as the background of Sima Qian's composition, the unique structure of *Shi ji* and its functions, and Sima's philosophy of wars and literature, and so forth.³⁷ I categorize his study in literary camp in this section for two reasons. One is that, like Jin Shengtan, he views Sima as an author who was responsible for the current form of *Shi ji* that we see today.

³⁷ Zhang Dake, *Shi ji yanjiu*. 2001.

The other is that he wrote several essays about Sima Qian's literary talents, aiming to answer questions such as how Sima developed his characters. Like Jin Shengtan, while acknowledging that Sima Qian used some literary techniques and imagination in the *Shi ji*, Zhang points out that historiography is different from fiction composition because the foundation of the former lies in historical events augmented by plausible imaginative passages by the author.³⁸ This notion is remarkably different from Hayden White's understanding of the nature of historical writing, as I will discuss in Chapter 1.

In his analysis of Sima Qian's approach to narrating and conveying meanings, Zhang summarizes five features on the basis of the text-author relation, including Sima's talent for presenting events, embedding his comments into narratives, taking advantage of satires, and so forth.³⁹ However, many of these so-called "satires" may not be satires at all because they are based on a selective reading of *Shi ji*, namely making connections among various places in the *Shi ji* and pointing out their veiled messages. This is a method used by many scholars. But in most cases, we have controversial interpretations because we may never be able to know what Sima was thinking when he was writing.

Burton Watson, who translated extensive portions of the *Shi ji*, was probably the first scholar in the West to show interest in its literary features and Sima Qian's theory of literature. In his *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China*, targeting the general reader, Watson views *Shi ji* as a product of its author and his age like many of his predecessors in

³⁸ Ibid, 442-43.

³⁹ Ibid, 460-82.

the East. He examines the form and contents of *Shi ji*, Sima's biography, the influence of the *Chun qiu* 春秋 (*Annals of Spring and Autumn*) in early China, and the thought of Sima Qian. In the chapter "The Biography of Ssu-ma Ch'ien," the letter to Ren An and the postface of *Shi ji* are Watson's main sources for analyzing Sima Qian and his writing.

Watson not only explores Sima Qian's theory of literature but also notices "The Shih Chi as literature."⁴⁰ He argues that "Ch'ien believed that literature is a means of salvation that a man's literary works are what will assure his fame and make him known to later ages. The poems of the poet, the discourses of the philosopher represent the very core and essence of their personalities."⁴¹ Watson further uses this theory of literature to conclude that Sima embedded so many pieces of literature, from poem to song, from letter to speech, in his narratives, in order to present the personalities of characters in the *Shi ji*.

He briefly mentions that "this practice not only adds greatly to the power and effectiveness of his narratives" and "gives his history, and later histories which followed his practice, a special value in the study of Chinese literature."⁴² But by Watson's painstaking discussion of the example of "Hereditary House of Confucius," he goes back to his previous argument that these literary devices in turn, to some degree, reflect Sima Qian's own life.

⁴⁰ Watson, 159-74.

⁴¹ Ibid, 159.

⁴² Ibid, 162.

In his “An Introductory Study of Narrative Structure in *Shiji*,”⁴³ Joseph Allen borrows the method used by John C.Y. Wang to study the narratives in the *Zuo zhuan*,⁴⁴ Like Watson, Allen views *Shi ji* as a work of literature as well as history. This study is one of the few attempts to apply foreign narrative theories to *Shi ji*. Allen adapts the Scholes and Kellogg model and uses it to analyze *Shi ji*, which he believes is responsible for the whole Chinese narrative tradition. Scholes and Kellogg show that two basic modes used by literary works to convey meanings are *representational* and the *illustrative*.⁴⁵ Allen’s data was collected from direct quotes and comments in the *Shi ji* and his two samples are the “Biography of Wu Zixu” and the “Biography of General Li.”⁴⁶ His major argument is that, through examining the character, plot and point of view, “The *Shi ji* uses both the mimetic and symbolic in its narratives”⁴⁷ and “most of the narratives that are held in especially high esteem by the tradition are more symbolic than mimetic.”⁴⁸

Esther Klein disagrees with Allen: “The categories—at least as Allen defined them— are somewhat foreign to the ancient Chinese context: does it make sense to talk about ‘character,’ ‘plot,’ ‘and point of view’ in a culture that had not yet separated out a genre for ‘fiction’ (and therefore had not yet developed a discourse for analyzing it apart

⁴³ See *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, vol. 3, No. 1, 31-66.

⁴⁴ John C. Wang, “Early Chinese Narrative: The Tso-Chuan as Example,” 3-20.

⁴⁵ Scholes and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 89.

⁴⁶ *SJ* 66 and 109.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*. 66.

from its factual and moral content)? It is not that these categories are not present, but that they would not make sense to the author or early readers.”⁴⁹ She goes on to argue that narratological analysis can be applied to *Zuo zhuan* because it is a mysterious text; but *Shi ji* is presented as a text with an author and the issue of authorship is crucial to understanding not only the text itself, but also the interpretations of traditional readers.

Nevertheless, I believe narrative analysis is justified precisely because the image of Sima Qian as the author of *Shi ji* is shaped by later interpreters, although I am not fully satisfied with Allen’s study. The thoughts of Sima Qian are not known to us. Even if they were, different readers are likely to react and understand the same piece in dramatically diverse ways. In addition, the development of Chinese narrative is long. It is true that the author of *Shi ji* and its early readers may not be aware of any of the categories theorized by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg. However, this does mean that the author could not write a text without similar features. I discuss the justification of narrative analysis in Chapter 2.

Li Changzhi 李長之 (1910-1978) is one of the *Shi ji* experts who uses a typically traditional method. His project *Sima Qian zhi fengge yu renga*,⁵⁰ as the title already suggests, interprets *Shi ji* as a product of the time that Sima Qian and his father lived in,⁵¹ including their education and work, travel, personalities and so on. The images of the

⁴⁹ Klein, “The History of Historian”, 10-11.

⁵⁰ Li Changzhi, *Sima Qian zhi fengge yu renga*, 1963. For similar studies, see Ruan Zhisheng, *Sima Qian zhixin*, 2000; Itō Tokuo, “*Shiki*” to *Shiba Sen*, 1996; and Takeda Taijun cho, *Shiba Sen*, 1943.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 1-22.

father and son exclusively come from the postface of *Shi ji* and “Letter in Reply to Ren An.” Li acknowledged that some chapters were composed by Sima Tan and later scholars also interpolated some chapters of *Shi ji*. Meanwhile, he believed that its main body was by Sima Qian’s hand. Li also points out that Sima Qian was not a Confucian even though he once studied with Kong Anguo 孔安國 (?-127 B.C.E.) and revered Confucius, and that there are many citations of *The Odes*, the *Analects*, and so forth in the *Shiji*. Instead, the comments of many chapters show that he believed in Daoism. Li also attempts to date some chapters and connects these dates with Sima Qian’s activities year by year. He even deduces the purpose of Sima’s word choice and claims that Sima Qian’s thoughts at such a time impacted his writing in a certain way.

Moreover, Li Changzhi views Sima Qian as a super hero who contributed significantly to both Chinese history and literature in many respects. He contended that Sima was highly romantic and devoted his personal emotions into his writing without touching upon the contradictions in the *Shi ji*, except for briefly mentioning that the narratives in the main body of many biographies are objective whereas the final comments are often subjective. This argument is problematic. It is true that many narratives are reconstructed on the basis of imperial documents, other earlier sources or even witnesses. However, it would be a different argument to claim that they are objective. For instance, comments regarding a character are offered by other figures in

the same narrative may have been written by Sima Qian as well, in addition to his final evaluations. This is actually a technique often used by him.⁵²

Moreover, unlike Hardy who claims that Sima Qian was using Emperor Wu to criticize the past, particularly the First Emperor, Li contends that Sima actually used satires to indicate his piercing insights into the Han society, especially towards Emperor Wu (157-87 B.C.E.). Whereas these inspired comments on the basis of years of detailed reading, Li's general argument is based on his personal reading of the texts and Sima father and son.

Another work related to the representations in the *Shi ji* is that Michael J. Puett's *The Ambivalence of Creation*. He traces the debate and practice issue of innovation in philosophical texts in the context of early China and believes that Chinese thinkers in early China did not assume the continuity between the past and present. By analyzing Sima Qian's presentation of the rise of the Qin and Han Empire, Puett argues that Sima's stance on innovation is complicated. On the one hand, Sima criticizes the transgression during the rise of the Qin and Han Empires; on the other hand, he considers that discontinuity is necessary and unavoidable when something new emerges.⁵³

Li Shaoyong 李少雍 (1941-), who uses the same method but focuses on the biographical form instead, argues that the biographical form of the *Shiji* was invented by Sima Qian. Although there are scholars claiming that this form was borrowed from

⁵² Allen, "Narrative Structure in the *Shi ji*", 41.

⁵³ Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 2001.

Spring and Autumn of Master Lü (Lü shi chun qiu 呂氏春秋), his reason for attributing the appearance of the biographical form to Sima Qian's belief in the efforts of human beings in the development of history. I would like to believe this interpretation; however, I suspect that the author has over-simplified a complicated question.

It is true that Sima Qian used the biographical form. Nonetheless, it does not mean that he merely intended to emphasize the endeavors of human beings. Indeed, diverse factors intertwine in Qian's history as I discuss in Chapter 2. Using this genre may produce two effects: one is that readers would be presented with a chain of causal relations; the other one is that readers may have a better understanding of the rise and decline of a subject. Therefore I would rather concentrate on the effects of this genre in the *Shi ji*.

He goes on to point out that the existence of the biographical form has twofold significance: first, the features of this genre are closely related to literature; second, the invention of the biographical form is a result of the development of literature. He further analyzes the literary features and techniques used in the *Shi ji* to suggest that the *Shi ji* had a crucial impact on Chinese fiction.⁵⁴

A book-length study of *Shi ji* in English adopts a similar methodology. It is Stephen Durrant's *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima*

⁵⁴ Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian zhuanji wenxue lungao*, 1987.

Qian.⁵⁵ It is particularly worth noting that this is the first time that Sima Qian was defined as an ideologue as well as a narrator. These two competing roles, according to Durrant, produced a significant feature of Sima Qian's writing, namely the tension of *li* 禮 and *wen* 文. They are potentially in conflict as well as complementary in the *Shi ji*. On the one hand, Sima Qian's personal experience, such as the place where he was born and grew up, and the castration caused by offending the emperor for the event of Li Ling, is used to analyze the *wen* feature of the *Shi ji*. On the other hand, Sima Qian's desire to become the second Confucius results in the feature of *li* of the *Shi ji*. Durrant maintains that Sima Qian's compulsion to tell a good story indeed "undermines Sima Qian's pursuit of a unified version and frustrates all of us who would describe precisely the Han historian's 'philosophy of history.'"⁵⁶

Durrant's interpretation of the *Shi ji* is exciting; however, the two primary sources it uses are the "Letter in Reply to Ren An" and the postface of the *Shi ji* whose authenticity is hard to verify. If these documents were written by Sima Qian himself, they are his self-portrayal. If not, as is pointed by Esther Klein, it is plausible that they just composed an image of Sima Qian described by later readers.

Having noticed the former problem in Durrant's argument, Klein's study thus, to some degree, shifts scholarly attention away from Sima Qian's philosophy to the

⁵⁵ Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 1995.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, xviii.

reception history of *Shi ji*. Her dissertation, “The History of a Historian: Perspectives on the Authorial Roles of Sima Qian,” investigates the “changing ways in which pre-modern Chinese readers understood authorship through an analysis of their perspectives on Sima Qian.”⁵⁷ She argues that “we cannot know the ‘real’ Sima Qian: the tragic authorial figure of Sima Qian is a construction by later readers.”⁵⁸ Her goal is to see the relationship between the historical Sima Qian and the authorial figure of Sima Qian. The latter reconstructed by various readers throughout *Shi ji* study history in turn impacts our notion of Sima Qian.

Klein first examines Sima Qian’s authorial role in relation to the Classics and historical text, as well as to literary theory and composition. She then tracks Sima Qian’s place in the Tang (618-907) and Northern Song (960-1127) when *Shi ji* was considered an exemplar of literary prose. The second part of her dissertation shows that the personal tragedy of Sima Qian was read negatively at first but later turned positive in the Song. In addition, examination of the meaning of ‘veritable record’⁵⁹ over time suggests that such a notion “reflected and influenced traditional Chinese attitudes toward history.”⁶⁰ The final part explores textual issues. Chapter 8 investigates the accuracy and authenticity of the “Letter in Reply to Ren An” and the postface (referred as ‘Self-Narration’ by Klein) which many scholars consider the key to interpretation of Sima Qian and his writing. She

⁵⁷ Klein, “The History of a Historian,” i.

⁵⁸ Ibid, i.

⁵⁹ See the related discussion in 1.5 Chinese Historical Writing, 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid, i.

compared Qian's letter in reply to Ren An in *Han shu* (chapter 62) and its counterpart in *Wen Xuan* (chapter 41), and the "Self-Narration" in *Shi ji* and the letter in *Wen xuan* (chapter 41). There are many parallels among them and between the "Letter" and passages in the *Shi ji* were located as well. Klein reminds us of the fact that the real story of these writings is more complex than what most scholars have thought and we may never be able to find an answer. Therefore the relationship between the "Letter" and *Shi ji* should be reconsidered.⁶¹

2. Structure of the Current Study

Unlike much scholarship mentioned in the previous section, this dissertation, by using narrative methodology, aims to shift our attention from the authorial intention to the effects of the narrative devices applied in the *Shi ji*. In other words, instead of speculating on the relation between Sima Qian's plausible intentions (emotions) and his writings, I will analyze how the narrative structure affects the distinctive effects of the *Shi ji*.

The first chapter introduces my methodology—narratology. I discuss the form of *Shi ji* and analyze the nature of historical writings: they are reconstructions the past, rather than the past *per se*. Chinese tradition of historical writing shares many qualities

⁶¹ Ibid, 480-81.

with literature and there is no clear boundary between them. This edifying feature of history lays out the foundation of my analysis in the next four chapters.

I also trace the classical Chinese literary theory concerning the author and his text. Next, I move on to intentional fallacy, a problem of many *Shi ji* studies. In order to emancipate *Shi ji* from Sima Qian's intentions, I bring in Gérard Genette's narratological theory and explain why this approach is justified and valuable for the *Shi ji* text. Rather than confining myself to the authorial intention or how Sima Qian's personal life may have influenced his writing, this approach provides a new perspective and leads me to examine the relation between the narrative devices and their effects in the *Shi ji*.

Chapter 2 focuses on the encyclopedic quality of *Shi ji* in a broader sense. It has several dimensions, including structure, timeline, diversity of characters, and so on. Second, the network of causality in this ambitious work is broadly inclusive. *Shi ji* includes all the factors contributing to an event and embeds them in its narrative. The third aspect is its multiplicity of meanings and messages. I view *Shi ji*'s contradictions from the perspective of the relation between the text and readers. Indeed, a reader's interpretation of a text is subject to contextual cues. Thus different readers will respond differently to the same narrative, seeing different implications in it. I argue that these encyclopedic features of *Shi ji* vitiate any neat pattern of history.

I move to the temporal order of *Shi ji* in Chapter 3, in which I investigate the causal relations of episodes set up through the temporal order of events within a given

chapter. I introduce the three types of narrative orders, including prolepses, analypses, and the simultaneous type in the *Shi ji*. I argue that by distorting the sequence of events, the text sets up an extraordinarily complicated network of causalities, one which greatly influences the effects of the work, and in turn, the reader's understanding of the past.

In Chapter 4, I discuss two significant ways to regulate information in a narrative, duration and mood. By examining their practice in the *Shi ji*, I highlight how these mimetic effects are produced in narrative and its influence in the function of history. Without changing the facts, histories can produce different effects by adjusting the duration and mood of narratives. I argue that *Shi ji* is interested in *how* the historical process takes place by comparing the duration and mood in the *Shi ji*, *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the vivid characters and their characterization process. By bringing in the definition of "character" in narratology, I analyze the nature of characters and how they are constructed in narratives. Speeches, actions, psychological portraits all interact with each other and thus contribute to the attractiveness of *Shi ji*'s characters. I argue that, because of the biographical genre, the issues of reading order for the first time become significant. It also makes the qualities of coherence and character development possible. Therefore, the predictability of *Shi ji* and *Zuo zhuan* are remarkably different.

Narration is an art. History narrates the past is just like using the building blocks to construct a house. The building blocks are the historical events. The *Shi ji*, by organizing its building blocks, reconstructs the past in a distinctive way.

3. A Brief Introduction of *Chunqiu*, *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu*

In this study, I will frequently mention four significant historical works. They are: the *Chun qiu* 春秋 (Annals of Spring and Autumn), *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary), *Guo yu* 國語 (Discourses of the States), and *Han shu* 漢書 (The History of Former Han).

A number of Chinese historical writings were produced earlier than the *Shi ji*. *Chun qiu*, as one of the earliest, was traditionally believed to have been written or edited by Confucius (? 551-479 B.C.E.), although we may never know its real author and date. It is a chronicle compiled according to the reigns of twelve dukes of the state of Lu (魯) covering the period from 722 to 481 B.C.⁶² This work is a remarkably dry and succinct record of both the internal affairs of Lu and events in other contemporary states that it was involved with, such as diplomatic conferences, wars, and other relations with neighboring states, and occasional records of eclipses, floods, earthquakes, and prodigies of nature. “Its accounts are entirely impersonal, with no trace, at least to the untutored eye,

⁶² Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 75.

of the personality or attitude of the recorder or recorders.”⁶³ For example, in its first entry, for 772 B.C.E., a mere seven lines in 65 characters are used to cover the whole year.

The first three lines read,

元年春王正月。
三月公及邾儀父盟于蔑。
夏五月鄭伯克段于鄢。⁶⁴

First year [of the reign], spring, the royal first month.
In the third month, Lord Yin of Lu and Zhu Yifu made a covenant in Mie.
In the summer, the fifth month, vanquished Duan in Yan.

The conciseness and fragmentary nature *Chunqiu* led to diverse interpretations by the three commentaries that have been transmitted alongside it. As Watson said, describing the traditional understanding,

One of the characteristics of the *Annals*, according to its commentaries, is the fine shades of meaning which Confucius conveyed by his precise choice of words. The exact terms used to refer to a person or describe an action was what, in many cases, conveyed his praise or blame. But we will be disappointed, I believe, if we attempt to discover any such preciseness in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's use of words and terms. Like any great writer he was undoubtedly a seeker of the *mot juste*. But his history is far too large and sprawling, too vigorous and colorful, to permit the nicety of terminology which the commentators find (with what justice may be questioned) in the brief entries of the Lu chronicle.⁶⁵

Another disadvantage of the annalistic form of *Chun qiu* is that all the events of other states have been broken up and appended to dated entries of the Lu chronicle. The

⁶³ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁴ *Chun qiu*, Yin 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1-7. All the references to *Chun qiu* and *Zuo zhuan* cite the name of dukes, the year of his reign, the section within that year, and page numbers as in Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*.

⁶⁵ Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 93-94.

narration jumps back and forth from the events of one state to another, while the recital of a single chain of events in one state is broken up and scattered by the overriding dictates of the Lu chronology.⁶⁶ This makes it difficult to connect events, and to trace the rise and decline of states, clans and individuals.

The *Mencius* claims that Confucius himself was the author of *Chunqiu* and it has significant political meanings since Confucius' intention was to correct violations of good orders of the Zhou.⁶⁷ Scholars of the Confucian school in the Han believed that there were three main commentaries, *Zuo zhuan* (attributed to Zuo Qiuming 左丘明), *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳, and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳, interpreting the subtle and laconic *Chunqiu*. *Zuo zhuan* was compiled in the 4th century B.C.E.⁶⁸ Its current form follows the order of *Chun qiu* and supplements each entry with narratives and comments. In contrast, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries take the form of a catechism to reason through the subtle meanings of *Chun qiu*.

The relationship between *Chun qiu* and *Zuo zhuan* is unclear.⁶⁹ The former does not include any exchanges between protagonists, but *Zuo zhuan* often contains long speeches and conversations in the form of direct quotations. It also elaborates on events at considerable length, although the corresponding records in *Chunqiu* do not give details.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 101-102.

⁶⁷ See *Mengzi zhushu*, 210.

⁶⁸ Goldin, "Hermeneutics of Emmentaler," 75-78.

⁶⁹ One reason is that *Chun qiu* ends in the year of 481 B.C.E., whereas *Zuo zhuan* ends in the year of 464 B.C.E. Ibid, 78.

This does not mean that *Chunqiu* and *Zuo zhuan* always correspond; in fact, it is also not uncommon to find that an entry in the *Chunqiu* is not illustrated in the *Zuo zhuan* (It is often referred as *you jing wu zhuan* 有經無傳), and that *Zuo zhuan* includes narratives that are not mentioned in the *Chunqiu* (referred as *you zhuan wu jing* 有傳無經). These three situations all appears in the 28th year of Lord Zhuang's reign. In the *Chunqiu*, Chu's attack on Zheng in the autumn was briefly summarized by eleven characters; in contrast, *Zuo zhuan* presents the attack in a well-developed narrative in several lines, including exchanges among personages, to depict this battle. An example of *you jing wu zhuan* is that the entry of summer in that year, about the death of Suo, Viscount Zhu, does not have a corresponding section in the *Zuo zhuan*. The opposite example also comes from this year. *Zuo zhuan* contains detailed descriptions of Lord Xian's marrying Lady Li and Lady Li's tactic for replacing the Heir-apparent with her own son, although the *Chunqiu* does not have a word about these events.⁷⁰

These disadvantages of the annalistic form probably contributed to the shift from annals to narratives as a form to represent the past. Although *Zuo zhuan* follows the chronological order of *Chunqiu*, it already showed to some degree this tendency to

⁷⁰ *Chunqiu* frequently groups its entries in four sections, which often begin with the four seasons from spring until winter. Its summer entry about Viscount Zhu 邾子貜 is not explained in the *Zuo zhuan*. Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (? - 651 B.C.E.) vanquished the *rong* tribe and took Lady Li 驪姬 back to Jin. She gave birth to Xiqi 奚齊 and schemed to let Yiwu replace the Heir-apparent Shensheng 申生 born by the lord's other concubine, Lady Jiang.

employ extensive and detailed narratives. Actually, its current form makes it hard for readers to perceive the connections among events, despite the logics within an event.

Guo yu 國語 (Discourses of the States) is another work compiled earlier than the *Shi ji*. It is attributed to Zuo Qiuming as well, although this is doubtful. Its date is not clear either; it covers the period from the time of King Mu of Zhou (周穆王 r. 956-918 B.C.E.) to that of King Jing of Zhou (周景王 r. 519-476 B.C.E.). Sima Qian mentions it several times in his book.⁷¹ Its 21 chapters include sections for each of the eight feudal states: Zhou, Lu, Qi, Jin, Zheng, Chu, Wu and Yue, whose materials are listed chronologically.⁷² Its title suggests that the primary goal of this work is to record discourses; therefore direct speeches occupy a large proportion of each chapter. However, it is not merely a collection of excerpts or quotations; a basic context is offered for each item.

Guo yu departs from the annalistic form of *Chunqiu* by arranging the materials for each state into one chapter, although the narration within each chapter is still chronological.

Han shu is the first dynastic history, describing the Former or Western Han. It begins with the Chu-Han transition and ends with the fall of Wang Mang 王莽 (45-23

⁷¹ *Guo yu* is mentioned three times in the *Shi ji*, including the “Basic Annals of the Five Emperors” (*SJ* 1), “The Annual Table of the Twelve Feudal Lords” (*SJ* 14), and the postface (*SJ* 130). According to *Shi ji*, the author of *Guo yu* is Zuo Qiuming and he had once actually met Confucius.

⁷² Loewe, *Early Chinese Text*, 264.

A.D.) in A.D. 23. Therefore, the period from the Chu-Han transition to the Sima Qian's time is covered both by *Shi ji* and *Han shu*. The relation between the two works is complicated. Some materials are exactly the same, while the organization and distribution may have been adjusted. In the current study, I will compare the parallels and focus on their structural differences.

The *Han shu* was attributed to Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), but this project was initiated by his father, Ban Biao 班彪 (3-54). Ban Gu died before he completed the work. His sister Ban Zhao 班昭 (? 48-? 116) eventually finished *Han shu* with assistance of Ma Xu 馬續. It borrows the model of *Shi ji*, but it did not copy its structure. Instead, *Han shu* created innovative divisions, such as removing the “hereditary house” section in *Shi ji*, but adding a new part on the extant literature, called “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志. There are a range of opinions on its literary and historical value. However that may be, for thousands of years, scholars have managed to interest themselves in comparing *Shi ji* and *Han shu* in many aspects.

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY

To avoid the problem of the intentional fallacy committed by many scholars mentioned in the previous chapter, I propose to use a modern method to approach the *Shi ji*: narratological methodology. This chapter discusses historical writings from several dimensions and focuses on value which narratological methodology brings to the *Shi ji* studies, and, more generally, the examination of early Chinese historiography.

I first introduce the form of *Shi ji*, which lays a foundation for my application of the structuralists narratological theory. By bring together the classical Chinese literary theory in interpreting literary works and western critics' ideas about the intentional fallacy, I will show that interpretations of *Shi ji* based on classical Chinese literary theory by scholars from both the East and West succumb to the intentional fallacy. I will also address the question of the nature of history and will argue that historical writings are reconstructions of the past by the historian, inflected by several features specific to a Chinese context.

I then move on to introduce Gérard Genette's approach to narrative analysis and explain why this modern method, which originated in the West, is justified for the analysis of the ancient Chinese text *Shi ji*. I discuss three aspects: the first aspect is about the differences between two major formats of historical writings: annals and narratives; the second aspect analyzes the roles of historians in early China; the final aspect

introduces the structure and contents of *Shi ji*. I argue that *Shi ji* is remarkably different from its predecessors in two ways. One is that it organizes materials differently. The other is that narratives with a crucial impact on its way of producing meanings occupy most of the space in the *Shi ji*.

1.1 The Form of *Shi ji*

Shi ji was composed in the first century B.C.E. by Sima Qian and perhaps his father Sima Tan 司馬談(?-110 B.C.E.). Written in the language of the Western Han (206B.C.E.- A.D. 8) to convey its meanings, *Shi ji* has all the narrative elements that Genette's theory explores. It also uses a combination of several modes that White analyzed in his *Metahistory*. *Shi ji* uses a creative structure unlike that of *Chun qiu*, *Zuo zhuan* or *Guo yu*, in using narratives as the basic unit of many chapters. Sima Qian created the genre of biography in order to give his chapters individual subjects. In this section, I will first introduce the structure, form, and contents of *Shi ji* and then elaborate on the differences between *Shi ji* and its predecessors and the role of the narratives in this highly creative work.

Five sections divide a total of 130 chapters in the *Shi ji*: twelve chapters in the form of *benji* 本紀 (basic annals) are chronological accounts of early dynasties as well as

rulers in Qin, Han, and the chaotic Qin-Han transition⁷³; ten chapters of *biao* 表 (tables), which list chronologically major events and the sequence of rulers, famous ministers, and other noteworthy figures. Most tables begin with a preface, long or short, commenting and reflecting on the events covered by the table. The section of *shu* 書 (treatises), in eight chapters, covers a wide range of crucial topics for government and administration, including rites, music, military power, calendar, astrology, sacrifices, topography, and economy; *shijia* 世家 (hereditary houses), in thirty chapters, primarily describe feudal families during the Zhou and Han dynasties, recording their activities from their rise to their fall. Finally, seventy biographies in the section of *liezhuan* 列傳 (biographies) are about diverse individuals, either worthy or wicked, deserving to be commemorated. Some chapters are individual, and some are group biographies. A few are about ethnic groups and are not biographical.⁷⁴ The last chapter (130th) is a biography of the Sima family with an outline of the entire work appended.

In all five sections, the subjects of *Shi ji* include political units, such as feudal states, dynasties, hereditary houses, foreign lands, and institutions; and historical figures,

⁷³ Both “Basic Annals of Qin” (*SJ* 5) and “Basic Annals of the First Emperor” (*SJ* 6) describe rulers of Qin from the time it was established as a state until it became an empire unified by the First Emperor (259-210 B.C.E.) in the *benji* section.

⁷⁴ There is no consensus on how to translate the two characters. Translating *zhuan* into “biography” instead of “tradition” is proposed by Stephen Durrant. See his *The Cloudy Mirror*, 212-17; however, William H. Nienhauser does not agree with the point that *lie* means “arranged”; rather, he believes that *lie* is a plural marker. I follow the latter and use “biography” for most of the chapters in this *liezhan* section. As for those chapters whose subjects are the peripheral states, such as Nanyue, I translate *liezhuan* as “account.”

ranging from emperors, statesmen, generals to women, jokesters, fortune-tellers, and assassins.

1.2 Classical Chinese Literary Theory

Chinese literature has a long tradition of paying attention to the feelings and emotions of the author and has used them as a tool to interpret literary works, including poems, songs, prose, and historical works. In other words, this tradition believes that an author is able to clearly express himself in his work and thereby conveys his feelings and emotions to the reader. Therefore, in this situation, a qualified reader is expected not only to read through the work, but also to grasp what the author intended to say between the lines. This type of deep communication that goes beyond the words between an author and a reader is considered the ultimate way to appreciate the beauty of literature.

This conception has been dominating in Chinese literary criticism for centuries, as we can see from the following citations. When referring to the psychological approach to interpretation, “heart” is often used in Chinese literary theories. As shown in the excerpt of the preface of the *Odes*,

詩者，志之所之也。在心為志，發言為詩。

Poetry is the destination of the will. When it is located in the heart, it is the will; when it is expressed in words, it is a poem.

According to this theory, the location determines what the author's intention is called. When one reads a poem, he or she also reads the author's intention. This theory is also presented in *Mencius*. It emphasizes that literary patterns should not hinder the language, nor is the language is allowed to obscure the intention. Therefore, to understand the text, the reader ought to apply the author's intention in the text.

故說詩者，不以文害辭，不以辭害志。以意逆志，是為得之。《孟子•萬章上》

Thus one who would explicate an ode should not use the literary patterning to distort what is stated, nor what is stated to distort the intention. To engage the intention with [one's own] ideas—that is to apprehend it. (*Mencius* 5A.4)

We also read, in *Zuo zhuan*, that the primary goal of a text is to articulate the author's intention and that the pattern of a text is to facilitate the conveyance of the intention and promote its transmission. In this citation, this theory applies not only to poems and songs, but also to literary works in general. It reads:

仲尼曰：「志有之：言以足志，文以足言。不言，誰知其志？言之無文，行而不遠。」《左傳•襄公二十五年》

Confucius said: "There is a record of someone's thoughts which says: the language (*yen*) is to be adequate to what is on the person's mind (*chih*), and the patterning (*wen*) is to be adequate to the language. If a person does not use language, who will know what is on his mind? If the language lacks patterning, it will not go for." (*Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 25)⁷⁵

In addition to poetry and literary works, this theory has been widely accepted and applied in the field of Chinese historiography. The best example is the *Chun qiu* and its

⁷⁵ ZZ, Xiang 25.1, 1106.

various commentaries. Some interpretive schools (sometimes known as “the praise and blame” style) attribute *Chun qiu* to Confucius and believed that the work contains hidden and profound moral and political significance, which is known as “the praise and blame” style. Thus, various commentaries take on the responsibility of decoding the intentions of the ultimate sage, Confucius’, this method is believed to be the only way to understand *Chun qiu*. The three extant commentaries, the *Zuo zhuan*, the Commentary of Master Gongyang, 公羊傳, and the Commentary of Master Guliang 穀梁傳, compete in the Han Dynasty and scholars had a furious debate concerning which of them is the authentic bearer of Confucius’ teaching.⁷⁶

The application of this classical literary theory has extended to the interpretation of *Shi ji* and has been dominant for centuries. Scholars from the east and west, premodern and modern times, all underline the importance of Sima Qian’s castration as a result of the Li Ling affair, as well as his other biographical experiences, in reading his work. Sima Qian’s misfortune is briefly mentioned in his short autobiography, located in the postface of *Shi ji*. We know little more than that Sima Qian was castrated after he started to compose *Shi ji*. Thereafter, in this chapter, we read a well-known excerpt, in which the key word, *fafen* 發憤 (to convey one’s frustration) went on to become an important concept in the Chinese literary tradition. It reads:

⁷⁶ Loewe, *Early Chinese Text*, 68.

夫詩書隱約者，欲遂其志之思也。昔西伯拘羑里，演周易；孔子厄陳蔡，作春秋；屈原放逐，著離騷；左丘失明，厥有國語；孫子臙腳，而論兵法；不韋遷蜀，世傳呂覽；韓非囚秦，說難、孤憤；詩三百篇，大抵賢聖發憤之所為作也。此人皆意有所郁結，不得通其道也，故述往事，思來者。

The [authors of] the *Odes* and the *Documents* were troubled and in distress and they tried to set forth the meaning of their work desires and hopes. Of old when the Chief of the West, King Wen, was imprisoned at Yu-li, he spent his time expanding the Book of Changes; Confucius was in distress between Ch'en and Ts'ai and he made the Spring and Autumn; when Ch' ü Yüan was exiled, he composed his poem "Encountering Sorrow"; after Tso Ch'iu lost his sight, he composed the Narratives from the States; when Sun Tzu had had his feet amputated, he set forth the Art of War, Lü Pu-wei was banished to Shu but his Lü-lan has been handed down through the ages; while Han Fei Tzu was held prisoner in Ch'in, he wrote "The Difficulties of Disputation" and "The Sorrow of Standing Alone"; most of the three hundred poems of the *Book of Odes* were written when the sages poured forth their anger and dissatisfaction. All these men had a rankling in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished. Therefore they wrote about past affairs in order to pass on their thoughts to future ages."⁷⁷

This excerpt includes a series of famous authors and their works. Although some of the facts about these authors conflict with those in their biographies, the relationship between the author and his works is clearly stated: it is because all of the authors were frustrated and not satisfied that they were able, themselves, to produce comparably great works. *Han shu* preserves the entire "Letter in Reply to Ren An" attributed it to Sima Qian in "The Biography of Sima Qian." In this letter, we find a very similar paragraph:

古者，富貴而名摩滅，不可勝記，唯倜儻非常之人稱焉。蓋文王拘而演《周易》；仲尼厄而作《春秋》；屈原放逐，乃賦《離騷》；左丘失明，厥有《國語》；孫子臙腳，《兵法》脩列；不韋遷蜀，世傳《呂覽》；韓非囚秦，

⁷⁷ SJ 130. 3300.

《說難》、《孤憤》。《詩》三百篇，大底賢聖發憤之所為作也。此人皆意有鬱結，不得通其道，故述往事，思來者。乃如左丘無目，孫子斷足，終不可用，退而論書策，以舒其憤，思垂空文以自見。⁷⁸

In ancient times, there were innumerable wealthy and noble men whose names have been obliterated. Only the uncanny and extraordinary are mentioned [today]. When the Earl of the West [i.e. King Wen] was in captivity, he elaborated on the Changes of Zhou; when Confucius was in straits, he produced the *Springs and Autumns*. It was after Qu Yuan was exiled that he composed “Encountering Sorrow”; Zuoqiu lost his sight, and so we have the Discourses of the States; Master Sun had his legs amputated, and Methods of War was compiled; [Lü] Buwei was banished to Shu, and the world has transmitted his Readings; Han Fei was imprisoned in Qin, and [wrote] “Difficulties of Persuasion” and “Solitary Frustration.” Most of the three hundred pieces in the Odes were created by worthy sages who conveyed their frustrations. All these men had anxious and suppressed thoughts; they were unable to achieve their Way, so they thought of posterity by narrating past events. Those like Zuoqiu Ming, who did not have [the use of] his eyes, or Master Sun, whose feet were cut off, could never be employed; they retired to write books in which they discharged their frustrations, yearning to reveal themselves in the legacy of their insubstantial literature.⁷⁹

The key word, *fafen* 發憤 (to convey one’s frustration) appears in both citations.

Connecting it with the castration experience of Sima Qian, traditional scholars summarize

this theory as *fafen shuo* 發憤說, “the theory of the Conveyance of One’s Frustration.”

Ban Gu is perhaps the first one as he wrote in the evaluation at the end of “The

Biography of Sima Qian” in *Han shu*: 既陷極刑，幽而發憤 (After being castrated, he

was imprisoned and conveyed his frustration.) Later, the Eastern Han scholar, Wang Yun

王允 (137-192) charged that *Shi ji* is a hopelessly defamatory text. He said, “Emperor

⁷⁸ HS 62. 2735.

⁷⁹ Translated by Goldin, see *Hawaii Reader*, 179.

Wu spared him from death, allowing him to write a book full of slander.”⁸⁰ The Qing scholar, Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608-1661) argued that *Shi ji* is just the literary product of Sima Qian’s frustration. In his words, 史記據其怨憤而已 (*Shi ji* is only to convey his frustration.)

1.3 Intentional Fallacy

Regardless of the critics’ accusation or appreciation, the frustration of Sima Qian has been considered his motivation of composing *Shi ji*. One common feature of previous scholars, pre-modern and modern, east and west, is that they have used the “Letter in Reply to Ren An” and the postface of *Shi ji* to read Sima Qian’s intentions and, thereby, to infer the meaning of his writing. They have predominantly taken only a particular approach: the psychological readings of its author, Sima Qian. They considered these to be the key to Qian’s thoughts, which could have influenced his writing because two texts refer to several significant themes, such as the castration, the deathbed scene of Qian’s father, the relation between *Chun qiu* and *Shi ji*. Nonetheless, the conclusions of these scholars differ considerably. They even infer the author’s feelings and emotions from a single word or sentence.

⁸⁰ *Hou Han shu* 60B, 2006.

This narrow interpretation constrains our understanding by exclusively focusing on the author's personal pains and purposes. There are two aspects to this problem: this method mistakenly equates the author with the text; and it overlooks the participation of readers in the interpretive process. Once an author completes a work, it belongs not to him but to the public. Just as there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes, readers draw diverse interpretations of the same text, none of which necessarily matches the intentions and expectations of the author. Even the same reader may react differently when he or she reads the same work at different stages of life.

I argue that their efforts to psychoanalyze the author do not lead to defensible inferences about Sima Qian's work. As early as in 1946, William K Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley pointed out the problems involved in reading an author's intention back into his work. Although they tended to focus on the relation between a poet and his or her poem, they explicitly showed the problems of this method and criticized a series of propositions that many critics take for granted.⁸¹ One of their propositions is "One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention

⁸¹ W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954. Also see Burke, Seán. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida* (3 ed.), 2010.

that did not become effective in the poem.”⁸² In the case of *Shi ji*, the reason why scholars do not agree on its meanings is partly that Sima Qian’s intention is not explicitly recorded in the *Shi ji*, even in its postface, and partly that one can always find contrary evidence that undermines any supposed intention. As a result, the “Letter in Reply to Ren An” became a possible external source to infer Sima Qian’s intention. However, as is discussed in the previous section, the authenticity of this letter is not certain.

Furthermore, Wimsatt and Beardsley suggested that a poem is no longer its author’s or the critic’s. “(It is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public.”⁸³ This serves to explain from another perspective, why scholars as well as readers cannot agree on the interpretation of *Shi ji*.

Unlike Wimsatt and Beardsley, who contended that the intention of author is not knowable, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) stepped back to some degree. He was a German literary critic who study hermeneutics and authorial intention. His major arguments are included in *Wahrheit and Methode*, which was later translated into English as *Truth and Method*.⁸⁴ According to David Weberman, Gadamer is a non-intentionalist who, nevertheless, did not deny that the intention of an author is sometimes helpful.⁸⁵

⁸² Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon*, 3.

⁸³ Ibid, 5.

⁸⁴ Translated by Joel Weisheimer and Donard G. Marshall and published in 1990.

⁸⁵ See Weberman’s “Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Question of Authorial Intention” in *The Death and Resurrection of the Author*, edited by William Irwin, 55-58.

“The fundamental thesis of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is that our understanding or interpretation of objects and events is always conditioned or shaped by our historical situation in a way not fully transparent to us and that this circumstance does not so much impede as enable knowledge and experience. So when we understanding something (a text, for instance), we always understand it differently from the way it is understood by others, without this difference necessarily amounting to an error in judgment.”⁸⁶

Weberman summarized his view of Gadamer as: “Gadamer rejects the deification of textual meaning with authorial intention on a number of grounds— by my count, six... (1) There is less in the text than the author had in mind. (2) There is more in the text than the author had in mind. (3) The text, like all language, has the character of what Gadamer calls ‘ideality.’ (4) The text is relationally constituted. (5) The text is not about the author’s mind, but about the truth of the subject matter. Each of these five reasons purports to show that textual meaning is different from authorial intention. The last reason is another type. It assumes that difference and supports the claim that (6) our interest typically is and typically should be directed not at the author’s intention, but at the text itself.”⁸⁷

The idea of the first group is that when an author is writing a word or a sentence, this word or sentence may not be able to reflect the state of the author’s mind at that moment. In Weberman’s words, “the author’s state of mind and intention may contain all sorts of

⁸⁶ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 47-48.

personal or idiosyncratic associations that cannot really be said to belong to the meaning of the text.” In the case of *Shi ji*, an example would be the description of Gaozu’s (Liu Bang 劉邦 256-195 B.C.E., the founder of Western Han) appearance in “Gaozu benji” 高祖本紀. It reads “The facial features of Gaozu are a prominent nose, a dragon-like face, and beautiful whiskers [on his chin and cheeks]” [高祖為人，隆准而龍顏，美須髯]. Sima Qian never saw him. He may have imagined his appearance or had seen his portrait in the Han palace or ancestral temple; but we, as readers, can never know how Gaozu’s face looked and by what standards his whiskers were considered beautiful.

The second ground refers to the situation when the reader overreads a text. We all have the experience of being misunderstood. A listener could get a message from your words a message you do not mean. The case of the so-called “satires” in the *Shi ji* is the best example. In the exchange between Sima Qian and Hu Sui 壺遂⁸⁸: Hu Sui said that Confucius composed the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* because he did not meet an enlightened ruler. He went on to ask what Sima Qian would illuminate in his project when he luckily living in the present peaceful age ruled by the enlightened Emperor Wu. Sima Qian’s answer was that his goal was to expound Emperor Wu’s bright virtues and transmit the merits of virtuous officials. Watson suspects that Qian’s answer to this question was a result of discretion, because he could not explicitly express his authentic

⁸⁸ See *SJ* 130. 3297-3300.

thoughts.⁸⁹ Is it a *qubi* 曲筆 (indirect writing), or part of Qian's real motivation? We may never get the answer.

The third ground is related to the two previous ones. The term ideality, borrowed by Gadamer from Husserl, means the logical sense in contrast to the material sense. "The meaning of a linguistic item is separable from the utterer's intention as well as its meaning in a particular context of utterance... When we read a text, its words have a meaning distinct from its specific instantiation in the author's mind."⁹⁰ Another term, implicature, coined by H. Paul Grice, conveys the similar concept. It refers to what is suggested in utterance, even though neither expressed nor strictly implied.⁹¹ In the case of *Shi ji*, Sima Qian's intention, as expressed by words is difficult to assess given the characteristics of the language he is using.

All the other three grounds are related to the relationship between the text, the reader, the language, and the world represented world in the text. The fourth ground is that "a text can and always will develop new relationships to other texts, historical events, differently situated readers, and so forth."⁹² As is shown in Klein's dissertation, comments on *Shi ji* are highly diverse, and come from various historical periods. The fifth and sixth grounds are based on the notion that language is the medium between an author's mind and his production. Therefore "a text's meaning is not a mere symptom or

⁸⁹ Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 88.

⁹⁰ Irwin, *The Death and Resurrection of the Author*, 51.

⁹¹ Blackburn, "implicature," *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 188-89.

⁹² Ibid, 52.

sign of the mental life of its author; it is a discourse, in some sense, about the world...

When we grasp the text, we do so not so much by speculation about the author's psychology, but by a tacit appeal to what it would make sense to say, given our logic and our prior understanding of the world." Likely, as the last ground shows, hermeneutics is not about deciphering another soul but the publicly shared meanings conveyed by language, something different from the intention of an author.⁹³ This is directly opposed to the classical Chinese literary theory discussed earlier.

In short, the goal of *Shi ji* studies should, in my view, be the meaning of the text rather than the intention of Sima Qian. Previous scholarship on *Shi ji* has consistently aimed to excavate the deeper meaning of the text by inferring the intention of Qian. This narrow interpretation constrains our understanding by focusing exclusively on the author's personal pains and purposes. There are, thus, two aspects to this problem: this method mistakenly equates Sima Qian with the text, *Shi ji*; and it overlooks the participation of readers in the interpretive process of *Shi ji*. Readers draw diverse interpretations of the same event, none of which necessarily matches the intentions and expectations of the author. Even the same reader may react differently when he or she reads the same work at different stages of life. This is exactly why there are constant debates on whether a word, a sentence, or a chapter in *Shi ji* is a satire, what Sima Qian's historical thoughts are, and whether he was Confucian.

⁹³ Ibid, 54.

Of course, this is not to say that studying the biography of Sima Qian is completely useless. Actually, Gadamer pointed out that thinking about possible intentions has two functions: first, “appeal to an intention encourages the reader to make sense of the work as a whole... reflection on the intent behind the text is a fruitful starting point”⁹⁴; second, it is helpful to rule out some misunderstandings, such as some blatant errors.⁹⁵

In order to solve this problem of the intentional fallacy, I propose to explore the features of the text, shifting the direction of research from the author’s intention to the effects produced by its narrative structure. I apply theories of narratology from the French Structuralist, Gérard Genette. By setting the text into a framework, I am able to systematically examine the narrative sequences, such as anticipation and flashback, the regulation of information in narratives, the speed of narration, and characterization, in the *Records of the Historian*. This is the first time that Genette’s narratological theories have been applied to analyze this work. It emancipates the text from its author by focusing on its narrative features. In this way, the project deepens our understanding of how the past is reconstructed in histories. In addition, my comparison between *Shi ji* and both earlier and later histories helps to delineate the development of historiography in early China. Most importantly, the relationship between narrative structure and its effects in historical writing is new territory for Chinese historiography, moving the study of *Shi ji* in a new direction.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 56.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 56-57.

1.4 What is History?

What is history? In order to answer this question, I will first discuss what history is not. While everyone agrees that history is about the past, history is not the same as the past for two reasons. First, historical personages and events once existed in a time and space that is no longer reachable. There is a gap between the events and the time of composition of a historian who writes about the past. In this sense, history is never fully accessible. The other reason is that the form of history that we have access to differs from the form of the past itself. To put it in a different way, history exists in books, archeological findings, oral traditions, and other media, while the past only exists in the real world.

Then, if history is about the past but without *being* the past, what is history? This question involves the sources and components of historical knowledge. Historical knowledge can be inferred from languages and physical objects in various media. However, the only form of history that directly leads to understanding is narration. Historical written accounts and oral traditions are in the form of narration. Physical objects, such as ruins of ancient architecture, tombs, and excavated objects, yield knowledge only when we interrogate them: what is the name of the object? What is its function? Who was the owner? Historical information must be constructed through selection and reconstruction, because the moment and space of events have collapsed and

no longer exist. To form our understanding of the past, all this information is collected and arranged to be meaningful. Thus, history is, inevitably, a *reconstruction* of the past, not the past *per se*.

An obvious example among many others showing the reconstruction of the historian is that historical writings are filled with details of events and historical figures, such as their looks, conversations, and actions, which the historian may never have had the chance to witness in person. It is the historical imagination that makes them possible.

In his article, “Historical Pluralism,” Hayden White compares two views regarding history whose principal difference lies in whether there is a single truth that we can know from historical writing. “For the pan-textualist, any representation of history has to be considered a *construction* and language, thought, and imagination rather than a report of a structure of meaning presumed to exist in historical events themselves.”⁹⁶ He criticized M. H. Abrams and Wayne Booth, who contended that there is a single truth to be revealed and recounting accounts can be ranked as to their veracity.⁹⁷

Historians must decide *how* to tell story, including how much information to reveal, from what perspective to view a historical event or figure, where the focus should be, how events are linked and so on. The history that we have access to is a highly selected reconstruction of the past. In other words, historical writings, as our major

⁹⁶ White, “Historical Pluralism,” 483.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 484.

sources of historical knowledge, cannot tell everything about history. The historian decides which events should be included in his history and to what extent his record should be descriptive, because he has limited space and time. It is not uncommon that historical writings skip over months or even years. Chinese history is usually filled with significant personages and events, such as rulers, emperors, generals, wars, earthquakes, and devote much less space to commoners. Some historical writings aim to be didactic and therefore prefer stories of heroes and villains. Many historians care less about things that happened every day, like routines and errands, unless they later lead to important consequences.

The nature of history discussed above shows that history and literature share some common features. They both narrate to represent a virtual world in language and use the imaginations to construct stories. Should historical writing then, be considered a kind of literature? This question may offend some scholars who consider historical writings objective records of the past. There is no simple yes or no position. We must return to the old question that what the boundary between historical writings and literature, once discussed by a many scholars.

Hayden White (1928-) investigated the form and contents of historical writings in a series of studies. In the first half of his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, he emphasized that the reason why historians in the 19th century presented completely different interpretations, sometimes even mutually

exclusive ones, is that history, unlike the natural sciences, is poetic. The historian in history is “characterized in terms of the linguistic protocol he used to prefigure the historical field prior to bringing to bear upon it the various ‘explanatory’ strategies he used to fashion a ‘story’ out of the ‘chronicle’ of events contained in the historical record.”⁹⁸

He acknowledged that events recorded in historical writings are not necessarily fictive.

...this is not to say that certain events never occurred or that we have no reasons for believing in their occurrence. But a specifically historical inquiry is born less of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred than of the desire to determine what certain events might mean for a given group, society, or culture’s conception of its present tasks and future prospects.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, the foundation of his argument includes theories of linguistics, philosophy, and literary criticism. He began by noting that histories are verbal constructs which take the form of narrative prose. In addition to raw data, a historical work not only includes a conceptual framework meant to organize and explains such data, but also a narrative structure that determines its mode of presentation. Historians integrate explanatory strategies on the levels of argument, emplotment, and ideological implication. Thus a work by a historian combines, one might say, many modes of modes.

⁹⁸ White, *Metahistory*, 426.

⁹⁹ White, “Historical Pluralism,” 487.

A number of scholars have used narratological methodologies to analyze fictions from late imperial China, but few have employed it to approach historical writings from early China. Anthony C. Yu scrutinizes the imagination in historical narratives by comparing the historical writings, which are considered serious knowledge by historians, and historical novels, which have more freedom to embed imaginative material.¹⁰⁰ He acknowledged that these two genres, whether Chinese or Western, both employ narratives as the medium to convey meanings. This approach to the writing of historical works inevitably allows historians to add their imagination to their serious writing. Additionally, because of the didactic purpose of historical works, which is to expose the wicked and promote the good (*cheng e quan shan* 懲惡勸善), the historians need to have such freedom to manipulate the story, to some degree. As pointed out by Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), the distinction between *shi* 事 (events) and *yan* 言 (speeches) in histories is that the former is not allowed to be distorted, whereas the latter may be edited more flexibly. Yu uses the word verisimilitude (*sizhengan* 似真感) to refer to the efforts of the historian, i.e., to let the heroes act and speak as what they should do.¹⁰¹ For Yu, the key to the boundary between the two genres are the standards of historical evidence, which turn out to be difficult for everyone to agree on. Therefore this

¹⁰⁰ Yu, "Lishi, xugou, yu Zhongguo xushi wenxue zhi yuedu," in *Yu Guofan Xiyouji lunji*, 221-55.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 233. Yu uses verisimilitude to refer to Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠's comments on historical writing that historians should be creative in addition to collecting sources for their writings. Verisimilitude is the goal of historians. It also explains the unavoidable subjectivity of historical writing. See *Qian jie shu* 前揭書, 290.

study concerns what the historians did to manipulate the representation, rather than the degree to which it conforms to or diverges from the historical facts.

1.5 Chinese Historical Writing

Chinese historical writings, like their counterparts in other cultures, share common features with literature. Historians not only fill in logical imaginations on the basis of the barest facts they knew, such as direct quotations and the interlocking of events in the form of cause and effect; facts were also sacrificed for didactic purposes.

Qian Zhongshu 钱鐘書 (1910-1998) once expressed the imaginations of *Zuo zhuan* in a vivid way.

《左傳》記言而實乃擬言、代言，謂是後世小說，院本中對話、賓白之椎輪草創，未據過也……此類語皆如見象骨而生象，古史記言，太半出於想當然。馬[司馬遷]善設身處地、代作喉舌而已，即劉知幾恐亦不敢遽謂當時有左、右史珥筆備錄，供馬依據。¹⁰²

The speeches recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* are actually imitated speeches and those in places of [characters]. [If we say] they are the prototype of conversations [or] spoken exchange in fictions and operas, it is not overwhelming. This type of language is all like to produce [an image] of elephant when see their bones. The speeches recorded by ancient historians often come from assumptions. Sima Qian was just good at putting himself in another's situation and speaking in the place of others. Even Liu Zhiji would not dare to claim at that moment there were historian of left and historian of right holding brushes for recording, which were sources available for Sima Qian.

¹⁰² Qian, *Guan zhui pian*, v.1 *Zuo zhuan Zhengyi*, 166.

As is pointed out by Burton Watson, however, these direct quotations are not a problem for Chinese readers throughout various periods when he discusses the direct speeches frequently used in the *Shi ji*. “Large sections of his [Sima Qian] history of the feudal states or whole biographies had to be constructed out of lengthy diplomatic debates set within the barest factual framework. But this abundance of direct discourses constituted no fault in Chinese eyes.”¹⁰³ Likewise, Li Jixiang contends that while the contents of *Shi ji* are based on historical facts, they are meanwhile mixed with reconstructions of the historian.¹⁰⁴

Paul R. Goldin discusses the historicity or objectivity in Chinese culture in his “Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric.” He points out that the early Chinese historical writings value moral sense more than facts because “History was expected to be edifying, not necessarily factual.”¹⁰⁵ One of his several examples which reasonably buttress this argument is about Dong Hu 董狐, a historian of the state of Jin. The *Chun qiu* records that Zhao Dun 趙盾 murdered his lord, Lord Ling of Jin 晉靈公 (r. 620-07 B.C.E.). The *Zuo zhuan*, which is traditionally believed to be a commentary of the *Chun qiu*, includes a full account of the corresponding event: Lord Ling was planning to trap Zhao Dun because Zhao Dun kept remonstrating. However, when Zhao Dun escaped

¹⁰³ Ibid, 163.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Goldin, “Appeals to History,” 81. For the reliability of episodes in the historical writing in the Han dynasty, see Schaberg, “Word of Mouth,” 17-37.

but not yet to the border, his cousin, Zhao Chuan 趙穿 killed Lord Ling. Zhao Dun heard the news and returned to the capital. The Grand Historian, Dong Hu, therefore wrote that Zhao Dun murdered his lord. *Zuo zhuan* quotes Confucius to the effect that Dong was a fine historian who insisted on his principle and did not even conceal the truth because of Zhao Dun's ethics. This is a perfect example showing that a historian distorted facts for the sake of moral principles.

This situation gradually changed after Sima Qian, the author of *Shi ji*. As Goldin suggests, "As far as one can tell from extant documents, Sima Qian was the first historian in China to engage in a sustained consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of different sources."¹⁰⁶ Later Chinese historians, if not all, "viewed the detailed accumulation of facts as indispensable to their work."¹⁰⁷

This does not mean that Sima Qian's historical consciousness contradicts the literary artifacts employed in the *Shi ji*. As Goldin mentions, "On the one hand, [Sima Qian] has been criticized by many later historians for inserting his emotions into his exposition and failing to maintain a judicious reserve... On the other hand, there is no denying that Sima Qian introduced a new historical consciousness by observing that sources must be handled critically when they are contradicted by other sources. Sima

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Qian's protocols for judging sources, though not wholly amoral, are nevertheless substantially less moralistic than those of previous ages."¹⁰⁸

There are two phenomena worth noting. First, from the time of Sima Qian on, *shilu* 實錄 (*veritable records*) became a compliment used by historians and scholars. Second, the direct quotations in historical writings were not considered a distortion of historical facts. The latter is remarkably different from a modern historical perspective, as I have shown in the comments of Qian Zhongshu previously. In historical consciousness, speeches are not considered interpretations of historians, the freedom of historians, events, described from a certain perspective.

Shilu 實錄 (*veritable records*) is a word which was widely used when premodern scholars commented on historical writings over centuries.¹⁰⁹ It was first used by Yang Xiong when he evaluated *Shi ji* as a piece of historical work and was later by Ban Gu, as seen in the excerpt below. The connotations of this term are diverse, depending on the person using it. But its use by Ban Gu certainly set up a foundation for all later historians.

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然自劉向、揚雄博極群書，皆稱遷有良史之材，服其善序事理，辨而不華，質而不俚，其文直，其事核，不虛美，不隱惡，故謂之實錄。¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹⁰⁹ Klein points out that this term and its translation are both problematic, but preserving it is worthwhile. See her dissertation, 179.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 327-28.

¹¹¹ *HS* 62, 2738.

However since Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong were extremely knowledgeable about the multitude of books, [scholars] all praised Qian for having the talent of a good historian, and testified that he was excellent at setting events and their causes in order, that he made arguments without being flowery, that he was substantial but not unpolished, that the writing was direct and the events verified, that he did not void the beautiful nor hide the wicked. Therefore they called [his work] a “veritable record.”

In this context, *shilu* actually refers to the way of presenting the past, or an evaluation of events. If the historical writing has no hiding, no exaggeration, then it can be called a veritable record. As Klein has shown, this term implies that *Shi ji* is direct and substantial, rather than being flowery and empty. However, it does not mean *shilu* are facts which are defined on the basis of a modern historical understanding. In contrast, according to the understanding of history in Sima Qian’s time, manipulation of speeches and acts were not considered distortion. Therefore, historical consciousness and his manipulation are not contradictory.

The *shi* 事 here means events which apparently do not include conversations and speeches that probably come from written or oral sources and compositions of historians. Some may argue that there was a convention to keep a record of the ruler’s speeches according to the claim that the Historian of the Left records the speeches while the Historian of the Right records events [左史記言，右史記事], a so-called convention

mentioned in the *Han shu*, with a similar statement in the *Li ji* 禮記 (Book of Rites).¹¹²

However, both *Han shu* and *Li ji* were compiled in the Han. It has been generally agreed that this theory of separating the duties of historians is merely a late rationalization of the fact that the contents of the two classics, *Shang shu* and *Chun qiu*: the former primarily consisting of speeches and the latter being a record of events without a single direct quotation. Indeed, *Zuo zhuan* does not follow, containing as it does both speeches and deeds. Liu Zhiji pointed out:

逮左氏為書，不尊古法，言之與事，同在傳中。然而言事相兼，繁省合理，故使讀者尋繹不倦，覽諷忘疲。¹¹³

In making his book, Mr. Zuo did not comply with ancient approaches. Speeches and events are both in the memoir. However, speeches and events are combined. Details and ellipsis are rational. Therefore, it makes the readers deduce, see the admonitions and forget fatigue.

Moreover, secret conversations between a husband and wife in their bedroom, or conspiratorial plans, certainly were not recorded by any historian, as none would have been present on these occasions.¹¹⁴

I agree with Watson that “words (*yen*) were fully as important to the Chinese as deeds (*shih*).” Moreover, the reason for existence of the long conversations or speeches in

¹¹² “Yi wen zhi” 藝文志 in *HS* 30, 1715. The “Pinzao” 品藻 chapter in the *Li ji* 禮記 reverses the duties of the two historians with similar a statement that “When the emperor acts, the Historian of the Left records it; when he speaks, the Historian of the Right makes a record of it.”

¹¹³ *Shi tong tong shi* 2, 91.

¹¹⁴ One example is the secret conversation between Lady Ji and Lord Xian of Jin recorded in *Guoyu*, chapter 7, chapter 8, 274. Lady Ji’s secret lover taught her what to say in front the lord. So one night, Lady Ji sobbed in front of the lord and much space is devoted to her speech.

Chinese historical writings, I believe, is because Chinese thought values men's intentions, as for a historian or narrator it would be difficult to judge the deeds without words. As Paul R. Goldin points out: "The new, Confucianized way of thinking considered not only the defendant's actions, but his or her intentions and state of mind. Identical acts were not regarded as morally equivalent if the circumstances differed."¹¹⁵ The practical aim of the historian is to integrate the materials into an organic chapter and to present a coherent and plausible past. Characters' speeches, like a thread, weld their actions into a chain and explain the direction of events even though the sources available to the historians probably may have furnished only the barest outline of an event, an outline which may or may not have been factual.

Li Jixiang explains the boundary between history and literature by examining a special genre, historical drama (*lishi ju* 歷史劇), whose plot is built on historical events.¹¹⁶ He compared three versions of narratives about Zhao Wu 趙武 (also known as the orphan of Zhao) in the *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji* and Ji Junxiang's 紀君祥 play.¹¹⁷ This comparison shows that novels expanded and distorted the versions of *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*, which have long been viewed as the true history. However, it is noted that the story was first described in the *Zuo zhuan* does not necessarily mean that the *Zuo zhuan* version honestly and accurately recorded historical facts. As the oldest story, it merely

¹¹⁵ Goldin, "Han law and the Regulation of Interpersonal Relations," 20.

¹¹⁶ Li, *Time, History, and Narrative*, 109-50.

¹¹⁷ Ji Junxiang was a playwright in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), but his date is not clear.

provides a foundation for later scholars or literati to work on. The relationship between the *Zuo zhuan* version and two others is not history and literary composition based on historical events, but the first (extant) version and later edited or developed versions.

1.6 Narrative as a Form in Historical Writing

1.6.1 Definitions of Narrative and Narrator

“Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other.”¹¹⁸ This definition requires two conditions to be satisfied. One is that there are a series of events or situations. Therefore, in order to constitute a narrative, there should be at least two events or situations described. The other is that the time dimension is related to these events that are narrated. According to this definition, short entries in the *Chun qiu* should also constitute narratives.

“Narratology is a theory of narrative. Rather than being concerned with the history, meaning, or function of particular (sets of) narratives, it examines what all and only possible narratives have in common as well as what enables them to differ from one another qua narratives and it aims to characterize the narrative-pertinent system of rules presiding over narrative production and processing.”¹¹⁹ Unlike many narratologists who

¹¹⁸ Prince, *Narratology*, 1.

¹¹⁹ Prince, “Narratology,” *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 110.

center on the narrated, “some narratologists considered narrative as essentially a mode of (verbal) presentation (the telling of events by a narrator as opposed to, say, the enacting of them on stage) and they defined their task as the study of narrative discourse rather than story.”¹²⁰

Meanwhile, Williams Labov defines narrative on the basis of a more complex structure. “A fully developed narrative begins with an abstract, an orientation with information on persons, places, times, and behavior involved the complicating action; an evaluation section; and a coda, which returns the listener to the present time.”¹²¹ A chapter in *Shi ji* typically includes a number of narratives and occasionally even presents them on different levels. With this complexity of *Shi ji* in mind, and for the sake of clarity, I use “narrative” in this study to refer to a complete biography and “episode” to refer to the shorter narratives which constitute the entire biography. For group biographies, such as “Biographies of Assassins,” narrative refers to the collection of episodes focusing on the same protagonist.

Of course, “narrator” refers to the person who narrates. However, in order to avoid using words which share the same roots as narrative, it would be useful to bring in Gerald Prince’s a grammatical definition:

In grammar, a distinction is made among the first person (‘I,’ for example), the second person (‘you’) and the third person (‘he’). The first person is defined as the one who speaks, the second person as the one who is spoken to, and the third

¹²⁰ Ibid, 121.

¹²¹ Labov, *Language of Life and Death*, 19.

person as the being or object that is spoken about. Similar distinctions can be made in narratology: we can say that the narrator is a first person, the narratee a second person and the being or object narrated about the third person.¹²²

Accordingly, in historical writings, the narrator is generally the historian who edits, compiles, or composes the work. It is noted that sometimes in part of an episode the author designates a character as the narrator. As for the *Shi ji*, although we know that some of the writings may have been written by Sima Qian's father, Sima Tan, and some chapters are appended by others, I will use "historian" to refer to Sima Qian and "narrator" for the narrating voice in *Shi ji*, for the sake of clarification. In other cases, such as *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu*, the use of "narrator" avoids inaccuracy because these two works were probably composed by several authors, not by a single one at a single moment.

Prince also points out that "there is at least one narrator in any narrative and this narrator may or may not be explicitly designated by an 'I.'"¹²³ On the one hand, in many narratives where he is not, the "I" may have been deleted without leaving any traces but the narrative itself; on the other hand, there are numerous signs representing the narrator and signifying his presence explicitly, although neither "I" nor "he" is used. For example, the narrator of *Chun qiu* left no traces. The following line reads impersonal, just as if the event happened spontaneously.

夏，五月，鄭伯克段于鄆。¹²⁴

¹²² Prince, *Narratology*, 7.

¹²³ Ibid, 8.

¹²⁴ ZZ, Yin 1.3, 7.

In the summer, May, the Lord of Zheng vanquished Duan in Yan.

1.6.2: Annals verses Narratives

One of the common features of historical writing and fiction is that they both have narratability (the ability to be narrated). Li Jixiang discussed the relationship between time and narration. Because of the nature of time, which never stops and keeps going ahead, human beings are never able to go back to the past. In contrast, historical time can pause and stop because a narrator (of historical writing or fiction) can resume at the exact moment when he stops. History is knowable to us, as the narrator can intrude into historical time to edit history.¹²⁵ It also accounts for the fact that history is reconstructed by the narrator who finds a perspective and distance. Therefore the history that we have access to, in the form of historical writings, does not include everything. This echoes to my discussion at the beginning of this chapter that history is necessarily selective; no one is able to write everything that has happened in the past.

Historical writing and fictions are complicated, as it is common to have diverse characters who act, and events can happen at the same time. The narrator can only describe one character or event at a time. Thus the narrative sequence is not necessarily in chronological order. Because time can be paused in historical writing and fiction, the narrator can state one character or event first and then go back to another to fuse the two

¹²⁵ Li, *Time, History and Narrative*, 74-9.

episodes together temporally. I will explicate the relationship between narrative order and story order in chapter 4.

Annals and chronicle are two major forms used in many different cultures at various periods. The basic form of annals and chronicle is: time+ event. This structure shows a way to locate an event in history. Annals have two features: one is that they contain the barest facts, as each entry is very short. “No central subject, no well-marked beginning, middle, and end, no peripeteia, and no conclusion. Most importantly, there is no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another.”¹²⁶ Finally, “they seem to have the same order of importance or unimportance. They seem merely to have occurred... it seems that their importance consists of nothing other than the fact that they were recorded.”¹²⁷ I have given examples from *Chun qiu*.

Narrative is another way to represent the past. It provides more information about events than annals. Focusing on a subject, in a manner fundamentally different from annals, each narrative has a story line. Thus a narrative is able to connect different parts of the story into one and conclude it. In this course, the narrator can decide which part is most important and deserves more words. Historical records are no longer fragments but an organic whole conveying messages. Meanwhile, historical writings like *Shi ji*, many of whose chapters contain several sub-narratives, do not necessarily produce compatible meanings. It is not uncommon to find related descriptions regarding one protagonist in

¹²⁶ White, “The Value of Narrativity,” *On Narrative*, 8.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

different sections of *Shi ji*, which may even convey opposite meanings. I will come back to this issue again in the next section when I compare *Shi ji* with its predecessors.

1.6.3 Roles of Historians

As discussed in the Introduction, the literary talent of Sima Qian in both the fields of history and literature has been widely recognized. His writings were even promoted as exemplars by renowned literati in the Tang and Song dynasties. Nevertheless, Stephen Durrant may be the first Western Scholar to define Sima Qian as not only a historian but also a narrator. These two roles on the one hand are simultaneously present while on the other hand cause conflicts in the *Shi ji*. Examining the tension between Sima Qian's ideology and the power of his fascinating episodes, he argues:

Those concrete events of the past are typically realized in narrative, and through these narratives, as we have seen earlier, Sima Qian's work becomes much less, and also much more, than the single coherent school he apparently sought. The literary genius, who sees complexity, contradiction, and ambiguity in the stories he tells, ultimately subverts his own "putative principles"—in a sense, he loses control of the text.¹²⁸

A discussion of the duties and roles of an historian is beyond the scope of this study. But I would like to extend the insight of Paul R. Goldin¹²⁹ by considering the functions of speeches as a form of imagination, known as *prosopopoeial*, and why fine

¹²⁸ Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 129.

¹²⁹ Goldin, "Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric," 79-96. For the historical consciousness and distortions of facts by historians, see 86-91.

historians wrote them in this way. Why do *Zuo zhuan* and other historical writings characterize historians as responsive, unbending officials who never compromise even at the cost of their lives, and why were direct quotations, which were manifestly invented, not considered a distortion of facts?

Our impressions of historians before Sima Qian come from several well-known episodes in the *Zuo zhuan*. One of the cultural roles of the Han historians descended from that of diviners in the Bronze Age. This involved writing down the ruler's questions and the corresponding interpretation of divination. The historian's work might also include keeping records of actual events, such as wars and diplomatic activities. During the time of Sima Qian, the historian was still responsible for sacrifices, the calendar, and astronomy. However, a role that has often been overlooked but recorded at many places in the *Zuo zhuan* is that of a counselor. They provided information to the ruler for court discussions and decisions. Sometimes they participated in discussions in person as in the example below.

定公立，趙簡子問史墨曰：「季氏亡乎？」史墨對曰：「不亡。季友有大功於魯，受鄆為上卿，至于文子、武子，世增其業。魯文公卒，東門遂殺適立庶，魯君於是失國政。政在季氏，於今四君矣。民不知君，何以得國！是以為君慎器與名，不可以假人。」¹³⁰

Lord Ding assumed the throne. Viscount Jian of Zhao (?-476 B.C.E.) asked Historian Mo, "Will the Ji clan perish?" Historian Mo responded, "[They will] not collapse. Jiyou had great merits for the state of Lu. He received Bi and was the highest official. When it came to Wenzi and Wuzi, each generation increased its

¹³⁰ *SJ* 33, 1543.

undertakings. When Lord Wen of Lu passed away, Dongmen Sui killed the legitimate successor and installed the son of a concubine. The Lord of Lu from then on lost the [power] of the state administration. There have been four generations since the administration was [controlled] by the Ji clan. People do not know the lord. What can the ruler use to obtain [control of] the state!” For this reason, being the ruler should be cautious about the talents and fame, and should not lend them to others.

In many cases, rulers recognized the value of historians’ insights and analysis of political, diplomatic, or military affairs. This shows that historians not only provided specific information concerning their duties but also served as counselors in general discussions at the court, exchanging their thoughts and comments with the ruler.

In the process of representing the past in his writing, the role of historian is indeed a narrator. This is for two reasons: one is that before embarking on a narration, narrators have to select their materials; the other is that history is told in the form of narratives. As Li Jixiang argues, “Of course, history not only consists of stories; but it must narrate because narrating is the basic way to express history.”¹³¹ One may argue that chronological annals which merely present terse statements about what has happened do not count as the product of narrator. However, the historian chooses how to tell an event. Although many Chinese chronological annals narrate without the intrusion of a narrator to produce a sense of objectivity, as I have shown in the previous section, the narrator never leaves his narration.

¹³¹ Li, *Time, History, and Narrative*, 24.

1.6.4 Signs of Historian

Signs of narrators in narratives include: 1) any second person pronoun which does not (exclusively) refer to a character and is not uttered (or “thought”) by him constitutes a trace of the narrate, which implies that there is a narrator; 2) spatio-temporal expressions indicating when or where the narrator is; 3) Modal terms (“perhaps,” “unfortunately,” “clearly,” and so forth) which indicate a narrator’s attitude by the narrator’s voice in his or her narration.

In addition to the above signs, Chinese historical writings have their own signs because of their own features. First, signs of narrators are often implicit in narratives but explicit in comments. This is achieved by an effort to separate the narrative from comments, aiming to improve the objectivity of the narratives. For example, *Shi ji*, in most of the cases, locates its comments on the corresponding narrative at the end of a chapter under the rubric of *Tai-shi gong yue* 太史公曰 (“the Grand Historian says”).¹³² In other cases, comments and discussions occupy the major space and narrative does not play an important role. For instance, in “The Biographies of Bo Yi and Shu Qi,”¹³³ almost two-thirds of the chapter consist of discussions and emotional comments regarding the

¹³² It is controversial whether *Tai shi gong* refers to Sima Qian or his father, Tan. Evaluations at the end of some chapters reveal that *Tai shi gong* should refer to the father. One example is Chapter 86 on assassins. The comments say that *Tai shi gong* spoke to Gongsun Jigong, Xia Wujun whose ages suggest that they can only talk to Sima Tan instead of Qian. See Li, *Sima Qian zhi renga yu fengge*, 155-62.

¹³³ *SJ* 61.

two protagonists, where the narrator directly throws his questions and confusions to the reader, and uses modal terms, such as *gai* 蓋 (possibly or probably), to explain his doubts or uncertainty regarding the sources of the narrative. For example, the narrator says Bo Yi and Shu Qi heard that King Wen treated the seniors very well and probably they went to join him. Unlike most other chapters, this one separates the narrative from discussion by *qi zhuan yue* 其傳曰 (“Their tradition says”).

This is not to say that there are no signs of narrators in narratives. Actually, another type of narrator’s sign is integrated into the establishment of causality in narratives. History is more than a collection of facts. It is a reconstruction of the past in the form of a coherent chain of facts. How the events are linked reveals a historian’s perception of the past. In the “Hereditary House of Jin,” as shown in the example below, Ziwei of Zheng went to a meeting organized by the Lord Xiang of Qi. Gao Qumi and Zhai Zhong, were both prominent figures at the court, but the former went whereas the latter did not. This episode reads:

子亶元年七月，齊襄公會諸侯於首止，鄭子亶往會，高渠彌相，從，祭仲稱疾不行。所以然者，子亶自齊襄公為公子之時，嘗會鬪，相仇，及會諸侯，祭仲請子亶無行。子亶曰：「齊彊，而厲公居櫟，即不往，是率諸侯伐我，內厲公。我不如往，往何遽必辱，且又何至是！」卒行。於是祭仲恐齊并殺之，故稱疾。¹³⁴

In the seventh month of Lord Wei’s first year, Lord Xiang of Qi met the feudal lords at Shouzhi. Lord Wei of Zheng went to the meeting. Gao Qumi served as

¹³⁴ *SJ* 42, 1763.

the prime minister and followed [Lord Wei]. Zhai Zhong claimed to be sick and did not go. The reason for this situation was that Ziwei of Zheng and Lord Xiang of Qi once fought and came to regard each other as enemies before Lord Xiang was on the throne. Zhai Zhong requested Lord Wei not to go. Ziwei said, “The state of Qi is strong and Lord Li [Ziwei’s older brother] is in Yue. If I do not go, [Qi] would lead the feudal lords to attack me and let Lord Li in. I’d rather go [to the meeting]. Going will not necessarily lead to disgrace? It also would not be like this (what Ji Zhong predicted).” Finally, [Lord Wei] went to [the meeting]. At that time, Ji Zhong was afraid that Qi would kill him too. He therefore said that he was sick.

In this example, the narrator uses *suo yi ran zhe* 所以然者 (the reason for this situation was) to insert a short analepsis, in order to explain why Zhai Zhong did not go with the lord. This result is connected with an earlier conversation between Lord Wei and Zhai Zhong, informing the readers that Zhai Zhong is afraid of being killed with Lord Wei by Qi. At the end, this analepsis is reconnected to the first narrative with *gu* 故 (therefore). The causality between these two events is hard to verify. However, because of the historian’s privilege of editing and freedom in interpretation, it is common to see, in historical writings, that he considers one or several factors or events to be the causes of one or more consequences. *Suo yi ran zhe* 所以然者 and *gu* 故 are therefore the signs of this action of on the part of the narrator.

Finally, when new characters are introduced or instructions directing the readers to find more related information are given, we see signs of the narrator. Sima Qian, in the “Basic Annals of Empress Dowager Lü,” introduces the titles of the Empress Dowager’s brothers and their sons. This introduction temporarily cuts off the flow of narrative and

paves the way for plots that are revealed as the chapter goes on: the Liu and Lü clans compete for the power in the court. It reads,

呂后為人剛毅，佐高祖定天下，所誅大臣多呂后力。呂后兄二人，皆為將。長兄周呂侯死事，封其子呂臺為酈侯，子產為交侯；次兄呂釋之為建成侯。¹³⁵

The personality of Empress Lü is tough and resolute. [She] assisted Emperor Gaozu in stabilizing all under the heaven. The executions of great ministers resulted mostly from the power of Empress Lü. Two elder brothers of Empress Lü were both generals. The eldest brother, the Marquis of Zhou Lü, died in service [to the state]. [Emperor Gaozu] enfeoffed his son Lü Tai as the Marquis of Li and Lü Chan, as the Marquis of Jiao. Her second eldest brother, Lü Shizhi, was the Marquis of Jiancheng.

Another example that one can easily find is that the narrator, to cross-reference information in other chapters, explicitly tells readers which chapter to go to. In the middle of “The Hereditary House of Marquis Liu,” the narrator informs us that the famous banquet meeting was introduced in the “Basic Annals of Xiang Yu.” It reads:

項伯見沛公。沛公與飲為壽，結賓婚。令項伯具言沛公不敢倍項羽，所以距關者，備他盜也。及見項羽後解，語在項羽事中。¹³⁶

Lord Xiang met the Lord Pei. Lord Pei drank a toast with him, bonded the reception and marriage [of the two families]. [Lord Pei] ordered Lord Xiang to tell Xiang Yu in detail that Lord Pei would not dare to betray Xiang Yu. The reason why he had defended the pass was to guard against other bandits. The aftermath of the meeting with Xiang Yu is related in the matters pertaining to Xiang Yu.

¹³⁵ *SJ* 9, 396.

¹³⁶ *SJ* 55, 2038.

In addition to these three types of either explicit or implicit signs, the narrator may be more or less intrusive, by which I mean “more or less explicitly characterized as a narrating self.” Their intrusions may be more or less obvious. “Evaluative” adjectives or adverbs or any comments embedded into the narrative are intrusions. In the above example of Empress Dowager Lü, the readers are informed that the Empress Dowager was *weiren gangyi* 為人剛毅 [tough and resolute]. This phrase is an evaluation by the narrator’s voice. His evaluation, to some degree, is subjective, and his standards are unknown to readers. This is related to two great features of Sima Qian’s writing: he frequently uses evaluative adjectives and phrases to describe or summarize certain features of his protagonists; but more often, episodes are another way to illustrate his characters’ personalities.

Another type of evaluation is less explicit, as it plausibly comes from a character rather than the narrator. In other words, narrators sometimes let their characters provide information to readers. The method is less intrusive because it conveys the comments and reactions of some involved characters from their inner perspectives. In “The Biography of Wu Zixu,” the protagonist’s father, Wu She, was arrested because he had admonished his ruler, King Ping of Chu. Bi Wuji, a wicked minister, therefore persuaded King Ping to kill Wu She’s two sons, Wu Yun (Zixu) and Wu Shang:

無忌言於平王曰：「伍奢有二子，皆賢，不誅且為楚憂。可以其父質而召之，不然且為楚患。」王使使謂伍奢曰：「能致汝二子則生，不能則死。」伍奢曰：「尚為人仁，呼必來。員為人剛戾忍詢，能成大事，彼見來之并禽，其勢必不來。」

Wuji spoke to King Ping, “Wu She has two sons. [They] are both talented. [If we] do not kill them, they will become [a source of] anxiety for Chu. [Chu] can use the father as the hostage to summon them. If not, [they] will become [a source of] worry for Chu.” The King sent a messenger to tell Wu She, “If you are able to make the two sons come [to Chu], you will live; if not, you will die.” Wu She said, “Shang’s personality is humane. If he is called, [he] is sure to come. Yun’s personality is tough and is able to bear disgrace. [He can] achieve great affairs. [If] he sees that [Chu] make him come to arrest him together [with me], his tendency would certainly be not to come.”¹³⁷

In this excerpt, several clues are offered through the mouth of Bi and the father.

First, Bi tells the readers that the father’s two sons are both talented and would probably bring disaster to the state of Chu. Second, from the perspective of the father, readers learn that Shang is humane and therefore would come to Chu whereas Yun is tough and steadfast. He would not come since he would be able to see that this was a trick to arrest Wu She’s two sons. This example reveals the voice of the narrator behind the speech of characters.

The idea that history is not the past *per se* but a reconstruction of the past can also be attested by traces of the narrator in narratives. The narrator of *Chun qiu* left scant traces, whereas *Zuo zhuan*’s narrator is more intrusive. He let his characters speak didactic lessons which do not have the function of pushing forward the plot. Meanwhile, the narrator uses phrases such as *junzi yue* 君子曰 (the noble man says), *Kongzi yue* 孔子

¹³⁷ *SJ* 66, 2172.

曰 (Confucius says), and *Zhongni yue* 仲尼曰 (Zhongni says)¹³⁸, which are more explicitly intrusive than speeches by characters, to attribute commentary or evaluation to Confucius or noble man. Eric Henry compared the evaluations attributed to Confucius and the noble man. The former category affirms or clarifies the subliminal messages of the narrative, whereas the latter category corrects or enlarges the minor messages conveyed in the narrative. He concludes that these different functions result from the editors of *Zuo zhuan* of c. 300 B.C. who inserted large chunks of preexisting Confucian material into it.¹³⁹

Shi ji has a much more intrusive and self-conscious narrator. Most of the chapters end with a section beginning with *Taishigong yue* 太史公曰, with exceptions that at the beginning or the middle of a chapter, where the historian states his perceptions regarding the narrative he has just told, occasionally his sources, the reason of including the chapter, and his questions and other related materials. The *Taishigong yue* 太史公曰 (The historian says) format feasibly evolved from the phrases *junzi yue* 君子曰 and *Zhongni yue* 仲尼曰 in the *Zuo zhuan*. The historian comments on the success and failure of his protagonists, their environments, their fates, and their policies. Sometimes, he even expresses his doubts and questions, as in the “Biographies of Bo Yi and Shu Qi.”¹⁴⁰ No

¹³⁸ “Zhongni” is the polite name of Confucius. This is another way for *Zuo zhuan* to attribute the remarks to Confucius.

¹³⁹ Henry, “‘Junzi Yue’ Versus ‘Zhongni Yue’ in *Zuozhuan*,” 148-9.

¹⁴⁰ *SJ* 61.

matter who the “historian” refers to¹⁴¹, this is the first time that a historian, in his own voice, directly communicates with readers. From the narrative to the remarks, the historian is always with the reader. Thus, history is editable and a production of the historian, rather than an impersonal or purely objective representation of the past.

1.7 Gérard Genette’s Narratological Analysis

Gérard Genette (1930-) is a well-known French Structuralist who examines the common features of narratives by focusing on their structures. He “distinguished between the narrative text, the story it recounts, and the narrating instance (the producing narrative act — as inscribed in the text — and the context in which that act occurs).”¹⁴² In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, he points out that “analysis of narrative discourse is essentially a study of three sets of relations between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the narrative discourse) between story and narrating.”¹⁴³

Genette builds a systematic theory of narrative upon an analysis of the writings of Marcel Proust, particularly *Remembrance of Things Past*. Adopting what is essentially a structuralist approach, Genette identifies and names the basic constituents and techniques

¹⁴¹ Scholars disagree on who the “the historian” refers to. Some believe it refers to Sima Qian while others think that it refers to Sima Qian’s father Sima Tan.

¹⁴² Ibid, 121.

¹⁴³ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 29.

of narrative and illustrates them by referring to literary works in many languages. He proposes a division which classifies the problems of narrative into three categories: tense, mood and voice. More specifically, he examined: first, how the temporal order of narrative, manipulated by the narrator, impacts the conveyance of meaning; second, modalities (forms and degrees) of narration; and finally the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative. These three categories investigate the three sets of relations that I mentioned at different levels: “tense and mood both operate at the level of connections between story and narrative, while voice designates the connections between both narrating and narrative and narrating and story.”¹⁴⁴

Genette’s study consists of three sections. The first section deals with temporal distortions, (that is, infidelities to the chronological order of events) and on relationships of linking, alternation, or embedding among the different lines of action that make up the story. He further divided it into three aspects: “the connection between temporal *order* of succession of events in the story and the pseudo-temporal order of their arrangement in the narrative...; the connections between the variable *duration* of these events or story sections and the pseudo-duration (in fact, length of text) of their telling in the narrative—connections, thus, of speed...; finally, connections of *frequency*...relations between repetitive capacities of the story and those of the narrative....”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 32.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 35.

The second section is about narrative moods. Genette cites the grammatical definition of mood in the *Litttré* Dictionary to explain narrative moods: “name given to the different forms of the verb that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express... the different point of view from which the life or the action is looked at.”¹⁴⁶ When one tells a story there are modal variations. The narrator controls the narrative “representation,” or, more precisely, narrative information. How many details should be offered to readers? In which way should they be offered? Thus “*distance* and *perspective* are two chief modalities of that regulation of narrative information that is mood— as the view I have of a picture depends for precision on the distance separating me from it, and for breadth on my position with respect to whatever partial obstruction is more or less blocking it.”¹⁴⁷

The third section concentrates on voice, which includes three interrelated components: the narrating instance, the levels of narratives in a discourse and the person. The narrating instance is more than the point of view; it is the instance of writing. This instance of course involves the relation between narrating time and the story time. Levels of narratives reveal the structure of discourse, which consists of many narratives at different levels. The person is about the role of narrator and narratee and their interactions.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 161.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 162.

1.8 Narratives in the *Shi ji*

Comparing *Shi ji* with earlier historical works, its structure and contents inherited some of their features. *Shi ji* generally follows a chronological order; and includes both actions and speeches of protagonists. Among many innovated features of the *Shi ji*, the most important for the current study is that, in many chapters, narratives take up most of the space. It deserves special attention. Unlike all previous historical works, most chapters in the *Shi ji* have a subject, which can be a state, a figure, a group of people, or a topic in economy, geography, or ritual. Among its 130 chapters, 118 consist of narratives. These chapters consist of a sequence of events in the form of connected episodes instead of independent items.

Although both Watson and Durrant believe that *Shi ji* carries on the tradition of compiling history attributed to Confucius, the different forms of these works actually show that *Shi ji*, to some degree, departed from that track. Durrant went even further to contend that Sima Qian believed that he had the mission to be the second Confucius and actually achieved his goal. However, even if we accept this argument, it is to be noted that one obvious and crucial difference between these historical works is that they take sharply different forms to represent events: the former is chronicle whereas the latter largely comprises narratives. Watson, while putting emphasis on the influence of *Chun qiu* on *Shi ji*, points out that there are differences exist. He discusses the meaning of the

phase *kongyan* 空言 and proposes that it has two possible meanings depending on its context: one is “empty words,” and the other is “theoretical judgments.” No matter which meaning the phrase *kongyan* refers to, *Shi ji* consists of numerous details which inform the readers how an event happened in process and why the consequence was produced.

Watson also observes that *Chun qiu* is not a good model for later historians and that, as a consequence, it was seldom actually taken as a model in reality:

“in spite of the fact that it [*Chun qiu*] was supposedly a record of ancient affairs written by the greatest of sages, it was a very poor model for actual historical writing. Indeed, as we have seen, it was in spirit often emphatically anti-historical. For this reason, and because it would be presumptuous even to attempt to imitate the moralizing of the sage, few Chinese historians have ever considered directly and openly modeling their work upon the principle of the *Spring and Autumn*, at least to the point of obviously altering the facts.”¹⁴⁸

Agreeing with his conclusion, I would attribute this phenomenon to a different reason. Historical consciousness was not established in readers’ minds before Sima Qian. I believe that the real reason for *Chun qiu*’s failure as a model is its abstruseness. Without the help of commentaries, one can hardly extract messages from this dry and highly concise work. Even before the appearance of the *Shi ji*, both *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu* departed in form and content from *Chun qiu*.

Moreover, Watson’s assertion that “Sima Qian felt that the facts of history, recorded just as he found them, told a story sufficiently interesting and instructive”

¹⁴⁸ Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien*, 83.

deserves reconsideration.¹⁴⁹ First, we may never know the feelings of Sima Qian. Second, in the process of exposition, it is apparent that Sima Qian improved the dramatic effects of events. Third, in many cases, the stories are often not instructive. The historian even doubts whether there is a way of Heaven and its fairness.

In addition to the innovation in form, *Shi ji* is also a creative work in contents. Some critics argue that the book is a synopsis because what Sima Qian did was no more than cutting and pasting from his sources (sometimes verbatim from *Zuo zhuan* and *Zhanguo ce*). This is, however, an unfair judgment for a historian thousands of years ago. First, *Shi ji* is the first comprehensive history. There were not many sources for Sima Qian to refer to. He explicitly states for many times in *Shi ji* that he did not have enough materials pertaining to a given subject. Second, even if he had plenty of sources, he had to select which events to include or what the focalizations should be. A given event could be represented in remarkably different ways and connected with other events with different interpretations of causalities.

Another reason is one of the principles of compiling historical books: sections on ancient times are briefer than those on recent times (*yuan lü jin xiang* 遠略近詳). The part pertaining to the Han history occupies two thirds of *Shi ji*.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, there is no

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 85.

¹⁵⁰ In the section of Basic Annals, six among twelve chapters are about Han rulers; among the ten tables, there are seven devoted to the history after Han was established in 206 B.C.E.; twelve out of thirty chapters in the section of Hereditary Houses are occupied by Han families; in the biography section which has 70 chapters, 42 of them describes figures of the Han.

doubt that the role of Sima did more than an editor or compiler. His invention of the five-section structure and the five genres, especially biographical form, shows that he was actually a *writer*, that is, one who cared about the form and structure of his work.

Since we have limited information about Sima Qian and his life experience, this actually constrains the interpretation of his work, I propose to explore the features of the text, shifting the direction of research from the author's intention to the effects produced by its narrative structure. I apply theories of narratology from the French Structuralist Gérard Genette. This approach is undistracted by the problem of authorial intention, and does not try to integrate the author's personal life into his writing. It examines the relationship between the narrator and the story, the narrative and the action of narration. In other words, my concern is not about what the author thought or intended, which we cannot know with confidence, but what effects the text's structure have produced.

By setting the text into a framework, I examine the narrative sequences, such as anticipation and flashback, the regulation of information in narratives, the speed of narration, and characterization, in the *Shi ji*. Exploring these aspects of the three historical writings raises two central issues that have not been investigated in the context of Chinese historiography: How do histories differ in narrative structure? And how do these differences impact the questions that a history can answer? Different histories pose and answer different questions, such as *how* historical events happened, *why* they happened, and *what* happened. If we define the answers that history can provide as history's

function, I argue that the differences in duration among the three works significantly impact their functions.

This is the first time that Genette's narratological theories have been applied to the study of Chinese history. It emancipates the text from its author by focusing on its narrative features. In this way, the project will hopefully deepen our understanding of how the past is reconstructed in histories. In addition, my comparison between the *Shi ji* and both earlier and later histories helps to delineate the development of historiography in early China. Most importantly, the relationship between narrative structure and its effects in historical writing is new territory for Chinese historiography, moving the study of *Shi ji* in a new direction.

CHAPTER 2

SHI JI: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

This chapter focuses on the encyclopedic character of the *Shi ji*. Here I use “encyclopedia” in a broader sense than in the traditional understanding. My discussion of the encyclopedic character in this chapter includes a range of aspects: first, the unique structure of *Shi ji*, which is a model for by many later historians, as well as its universal timeline, diverse subjects, and different forms.¹⁵¹ Second, *Shi ji*’s encyclopedic character is revealed by its inclusive network of causality. Rather than suppressing some factors to deliver a clear and repetitive pattern, *Shi ji* includes diverse factors contributing to an event and embeds them into its narrative. The third aspect is its multiplicity of meanings and messages. Unlike previous scholars who have concentrated on the historian’s authority, I attempt to answer why multiple lessons can be extracted from the perspective of the reader, using narrative analysis. These features show that *Shi ji* is an ambitious work: it establishes an encyclopedic political world.

Admittedly, the encyclopedic character of *Shi ji* partially contributes to its renown as a work of history. It includes different, sometime contradictory, versions of the same events and diverse factors contributing to historical changes, preserving many historical data which otherwise would have been lost. However, this encyclopedic character with

¹⁵¹ The *Shi ji* is divided into five sections. Each section uses distinct forms, i.e., annals, treatises, tables, biographies and hereditary houses. For details, see 1.1 The Form of *Shi ji*, 38. Here *form* refers to these ways and styles of presenting materials.

all its advantages also prevents the presentation of a tidy pattern of history. This array of complex, interrelated, and even contradictory information leads to the result that the readers have trouble figuring out the main messages of the *Shi ji* and generations of scholars keep debating certain issues throughout the history of *Shi ji* studies.

A large number of scholars tend to assume that Sima Qian aimed to show consistent principles for didactic purposes, satire and criticism, or that there are consistent moral teachings in his writings.¹⁵² If we ask whether this is true, the answer would be that we can never know. That is partially why it is important to approach *Shi ji* from a narratological perspective. In fact, the extant texts of *Shi ji* set up an encyclopedic and interrelated political world. This world has a special structure. It is worth noting how its structure produce particular effects and influence the conveying of meanings.

¹⁵² For example, Burton Watson, like many other scholars, accepts the view that many of Sima Qian's writings are hidden critiques of Emperor Wu, like many other scholars. See *Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China*, 33-36. However, I would like to point out, on the other hand, in terms of its encyclopedic character, even if Sima Qian had intended to criticize Emperor Wu, the *Shi ji* could still contain contradictory accounts and comments of the historian. In other words, Sima's narrating does not need to be coherent throughout the entire *Shi ji*.

Like Watson, Li Changzhi points out the satire of Emperor Wu embedded in texts, and discusses Sima Qian's philosophy. He notes that Sima Qian once studied with Kong Anguo 孔安國 and revered Confucius, and that *Shi ji* includes many citations of *The Odes* and Confucius' sayings; however, this does not mean that Sima Qian was Confucian. Instead, Li believes that the comments of many chapters show that Sima Qian believed in Daoism. See Li Changzhi, *Sima Qian de Renge yu fengge*, 218-226.

In "The Idea of authority in the *Shi ji*," Li Wai-ye argues that Sima Qian transformed the anti-historical tendency of Han thought suggested by Dong Zhongshu. Unlike Dong, Sima implied his moral teachings in his selection and arrangement of materials. The historian's authority came from moral authority and his empathic understanding. See "The Idea of Authority in the *Shi ji* (Records of the Historian)," 345-66.

2.1. A Complete Political World

The structure of *Shi ji* is creative. No known earlier works take this form, though genres such as chronological annals are attested. For example, both *Chun qiu* and *Zuo zhuan* take the form of annals. The extant *Guo yu* 國語 (*Narratives from the States*) and *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (*Intrigues of the Warring States*), dated earlier than *Shi ji*, organize materials according to single feudal states.¹⁵³ In contrast, as I have shown in Chapter 1, the structure of *Shi ji* is different from earlier historical works.¹⁵⁴

Grant Hardy has recognized *Shi ji*'s encyclopedic character and contends that it mirrors the world and reflects Confucian attitudes. He argues that the many accounts in the *Shi ji* focus on “individuals who possess different types of authority—doctors, philosophers, and diviners, who have specialized knowledge, businessmen who enjoy economic power, local bosses who enjoy political influence that does not come under the jurisdiction of the emperor, poets who speak with extraordinary refinement and perception, and assassins who despite failure exhibit exceptional loyalty and determination.”¹⁵⁵ On the basis of three considerations, Hardy contends that the *Shi ji* is a microcosmic model. Firstly, it is a universal history. “The *Shi ji* is a book in which everything and everyone has a place”¹⁵⁶; the second feature is that what “seems

¹⁵³ For further discussion of the forms of early Chinese historical writings see Watson's *Grand Historian*, 101-108.

¹⁵⁴ See 1.1 The Form of *Shi ji*, 37.

¹⁵⁵ Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo*, 42.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

characteristic of a microcosm is its lack of interpretive closure.” Through selection and simplification, it becomes a model of a real world. Third, the ideal of a microcosm attracted the focus of many scholars in the Qin and Former Han dynasties.¹⁵⁷ Hardy also connects the structure of some Han tombs which were built by simulating a dwelling space and TLV mirrors produced in the Han, with the *Shi ji* as a model.

It is true that a model sometimes helps us understand. The second and third reasons, however, do not necessarily support Hardy’s claim that *Shi ji*, as a model of the world, “employs simplification and selection as aids to understanding”¹⁵⁸. First, texts, tombs, and mirrors, even if there are similarities between the textual world and configurations in Qin and Han tombs, suggest different ways to represent a microcosm. Second, as pointed by David Schaberg, Hardy does not clearly explain how the *Shi ji* works as a literary microcosm.¹⁵⁹ One who aims to read the world as a model needs to understand the model first. Han archeologists and historians are still not sure of the structure and burial objects of Han tombs even though many of them have been excavated. Thus microcosmic and Confucian readings require understanding how the *Shi ji* functions as a model. As Schaberg suggests, the connection between Confucius and Sima Qian ought to be explained before reading *Shi ji* as a Confucian microcosm.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 51-52.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 51.

¹⁵⁹ David Schaberg, Review of *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian’s Conquest of History*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 61, No.1, 2001, 254.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 255.

Many scholars have acknowledged the encyclopedic character by pointing out certain various aspects. Watson notes, *Shi ji* is “an entire history of the knowable past,”¹⁶¹ especially its universal timeline and diverse subjects. Li Changzhi emphasizes the diversity of characters in the *Shi ji*. They are the two major aspects of the encyclopedic character, which have been recognized widely. But they overlooked a deeper sense of the encyclopedic that I discuss in this chapter. What *Shi ji* presents is not an entire world; indeed, the historian confined his writings to the political realm. *Shi ji* provides a bird’s-eye view of administration from the perspective of rulers, officials, and local governors. Lives of local commoners, such as peasants, craftsmen, and businessmen, are briefly mentioned but never a focus of concern. They serve merely to discuss the constant theme: what the right way is to rule. In other words, the *Shi ji* is encyclopedic but only within the territory of politics.

The specific form of *Shi ji* allows readers to see a political world vertically, from dynasties and emperors at the top to significant families manipulating power in the middle to individuals both in and beyond the court at the bottom. In addition to rulers and statesmen at court, significant personages, such as philosophers, poets, and even assassins, jesters, sycophants, and fortune-tellers occupy parts of biographies—and sometimes even a whole chapter. Ban Gu harshly criticized this innovation.¹⁶² However, these characters

¹⁶¹ See *Ssu-ma Chi'en*, 4 and *Sima Qian zhi fengge yu rengge*, 212.

¹⁶² In “The Biography of Sima Qian” in *Han shu*, Ban Gu criticizes Sima as follows: “His comments about right and wrong are considerably against those of the sages. When discussing the great

together constitute a political world in that they all, to some degree, interact with politics and power. In some cases, characters of very low status, without access to the court, directly affected the decisions or behavior of a ruler. Characters from the center of the political world to its outer margin were all involved in diverse ways.

“The Biographies of Assassins”¹⁶³ describes a group of assassins, some of whom achieved their goals, and some of whom failed. According to Watson, Sima Qian included a whole chapter about assassins because “men’s wills or intentions” (i.e. *zhi* 志) are crucial in Chinese historical thought. Watson believes that, in Sima’s writings, direct speeches expressing intentions serve as a rhetorical device when *Shi ji* is viewed from the perspective of literature. He takes the case of Jing Ke 荊軻 as an example and argues that Jing Ke’s assassination plot against the King of Qin (who later became the First Emperor) failed; however, he was recorded in the *Shi ji* because of his strong intentions.¹⁶⁴

Watson’s interpretation partly explains the presence of these assassins, but cannot be the only reason. In fact, these assassins were in close relation to the transfer of power if we look at these assassinations from a political perspective. A meticulously planned regicide poses a direct threat to the victim, a ruler, making it possible for someone else to replace

ways, [he gives] the Huang-lao lineage priority over the Six Classics. When he organized “Wandering Warriors [ch. 124], he gave precedence over worthy recluses and promoted scheming careerists. In narrating “Commerce and Trade” [ch. 129], he honored those who were wealthy while scorning the poor and humble. These are his blinded spots. “其是非頗繆於聖人，論大道則先黃老而後六經，序遊俠則退處士而進姦雄，述貨殖則崇勢利而羞賤貧，此其所蔽也。” See *HS* 62. 2737.

¹⁶³ *SJ* 86.

¹⁶⁴ Watson, *Ssu-Ma Ch’ien Grand Historian of China*, 163-64.

him. Most assassins in this chapter did not come from the upper class. Some of them were even not involved in politics before they were commissioned and started implementing a plan; but once they started, for a moment they determined the outcome of history. Jing Ke's failed assassination allowed the Qin Emperor to live on and unify contemporary states to form an empire. If Jing Ke had been successful, this would not have happened and everything in consequent history would have changed.

In contrast to Jing Ke's failure, successful assassinations truly changed the subsequent history. Zhuan Zhu 專諸 was an assassin employed by Prince Guang, also known as Helü 闔閭, to assassinate King Liao, who was the King of Wu at that time. When Zhuan carried out the assassination, Prince Guang was able to take over the throne and become one of the most powerful rulers in the history of Wu. One might deny that an assassin influenced the course of events and therefore deserves a place in a history, but a character's *significance* in the *Shi ji* encompasses more than his or her conventional roles; it is concerned with potential risks and real danger as one aspect of governance.

Shi ji also has a chapter about jesters (The Biographies of Jesters)¹⁶⁵ and two about diviners and divination: *ri zhe* 日者 (Biography of a Hemerologists¹⁶⁶) and *gui ce* 龜策 (The Biographies of turtle-shell and milfoil diviners)¹⁶⁷. A first glance at these titles

¹⁶⁵ *SJ* 126.

¹⁶⁶ *SJ* 127. An introduction to hemerology by Raphals may be found in her *Divination and Predication in Early China and Ancient Greece*, 37.

¹⁶⁷ *SJ* 128.

may suggest that they are about small potatoes. Actually, they have significant influence on political decisions. “The Biographies of Jesters” records how three jesters used unexpected ways to admonish rulers and to contribute significantly to the court and even the state.¹⁶⁸ One of them is called Jester Meng 優孟, a musician serving King Zhuang of Chu (r. 613-591 B.C.E.). King Zhuang was obsessed with raising horses. He provided them with beautiful houses, embroidered clothing, fantastic food, and so on. In the end, the horses died of overconsumption. The king, depressed, wanted to bury them according to the funerary rituals of officials. In order to stop officials’ admonishment, he commanded that he would have anyone who insisted in objecting to these plans executed. Jester Meng then wept loudly and requested that the horses be buried with royal funerary rituals, letting everyone know King Zhuang valued horses more than talented people. This made King Zhuang aware of the serious consequences of his absurd thoughts; he decided to cook the meat of the horses instead. Although jesters were recruited to entertain rulers by making jokes rather than admonishing them, *Shi ji* presents the sophisticated channels of good advice, revealing the political dimension of jesters’ life.

¹⁶⁸ Only part of this chapter was written by Sima Qian. It was appended by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (fl. 1st c B.C.E.), including those of Guo Sheren 郭舍人, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔, Master Wang 王先生 and Ximen Bao 西門豹. They played with words and were therefore favored by their rulers; however, these are not in line with the three that were probably written by Sima Qian, namely Chunyu Kun 淳於髡, Jester Meng 優孟 and Jester Zhan 優旃, who admonished rulers for their absurd ideas or decisions in unexpected ways. Therefore, we see they are different from those who rely on skills to gain the ruler’s favor as shown in Chu’s episodes.

In addition, divination is intimately connected to rulership and legitimacy because the rise of rulers depends on divinations that indicate *tianming* 天命 (Mandate of Heaven). The conception of *tianming* is that Heaven legitimate a virtuous individual, called *tianzi* 天子 (Son of Heaven), to rule on earth. The Son of Heaven can hand the throne to his descendants, but if they are no longer virtuous enough, Heaven will choose someone else as the new Son of Heaven.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the Chinese phrase, *geming* 革命 (revolution) literarily means to exterminate one's mandate.

Two chapters, “The Biography of a Hemerologist” and “The Biographies of Turtle-shell and Milfoil Diviners” show how divination is intertwined with politics. The former tells a story about a hemerologist, Sima Jizhu 司馬季主, who emphasized the importance of following the orders of the world, which ought to be complied with in the political realm. Most part of this chapter is a conversation between Sima Jizhu and two officials, Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-168 B.C.E.) and Song Zhong 宋忠 (serving the Ordinary Grand Master in the reign of Emperor Wen: 180-157 B.C.E.)¹⁷⁰. Direct quotations of Sima Jizhu's lengthy speeches analyzing contemporary politics take up much of this account. He harshly criticized court officials who failed in their responsibilities and abused the law for personal gain. He argued that diviners faithfully followed rituals and time, while some nasty officials broke the orders of the world. Therefore, wise

¹⁶⁹ Goldin, *Hawai'i Reader in Traditoinal Chinese Culture*, 32.

¹⁷⁰ We do not know the exact date. See the entry of Song Zhong in *Shiji cidian*, 235.

hemerologists looked down upon unworthy officials and avoided the nasty realm of politics in which those officials lived.

One may well argue that this chapter is a satire of the contemporary court, suggesting that talented people were not willing to work in such an environment. Other scholars might argue that this chapter indicates the significant role of divination in political decisions. Although in any case the authorship of this chapter has long been questioned.¹⁷¹ Regardless of its covert intention, it is obvious that politics are of main concern in this chapter.

The next chapter, “The Biographies of Turtle-shells and Milfoil Stalks” is another example showing that rulers depended on divination to make decisions. It begins with:

自古聖王將建國受命，興動事業，何嘗不寶卜筮以助善！唐虞以上，不可記已。自三代之興，各據禎祥……王者決定諸疑，參以卜筮，斷以蓍龜，不易之道也。¹⁷²

The Grand Historian says: “The sages and Kings of the ancient times, when they were about to establish a state, receive the Mandate of Heaven, or initiate an enterprise, never failed to treasure turtle-shell and milfoil divination to aid in their success. This time before the Thearchs Tang [Yao] and Yu [Shun] was not recorded. From the rise of the three dynasties, each was on the basis of auspicious signs... The rulers decided on various doubtful matters by referring to [the results] of turtle-shells and milfoil stalks. This is the unchanging way.”

¹⁷¹ The preface says it is said that this chapter is about diviners from Qi, Chu, Qin and Zhao. However, it is about only one Diviner, Sima Jizhu. Chu Shaosun inserted some of his own writings in *Shi ji*. Some critics suspect that Chu wrote the extant version of this chapter.

¹⁷² *SJ* 128. 3223.

This excerpt shows that divinations helps the rulers to make decisions on important affairs, including the royal succession. The rest of this chapter goes on to discuss the practice of divination, the approaches in different times, as well as the wise way to apply the result of divination.

Examples above reveal that chapters in the *Shi ji* constitute a political realm, covering every aspect of running a government. The encyclopedic character of *Shi ji* goes beyond the important personages involved in the political world. It also includes personages and affairs which were often ignored but should be paid attention to. A few words in the first few lines of “The Biography of Jesters,” which explains the greatness and inclusiveness of *tiandao* 天道, might shed light on the inclusive of this work:

孔子曰：“六藝於治一也。禮以節人，樂以發和，書以道事，詩以達意，易以神化，春秋以義。”太史公曰：“天道恢恢，豈不大哉！談言微中，亦可以解紛。”

Confucius said, “The six classics are unified in the aspect of governing: *The Book of Rites* is to regulate people; *The Book of Music* is to issue harmony; *The Book of Documents* is to speak of events; *The Book of Odes* is to deliver intention; *The Book of Changes* is to produce divine transformations; the *Spring and Autumn* is to rectify.” The Grand Historian said, “The way of Heaven is extensive. Is it not great? Discourse that hits the [point] can subtly resolve disorders as well.”¹⁷³

The six classics aid in their respective aspects, but *tiandao* comprises more than six aspects. As the historian says, *tiandao* is so great that jesters’ skillful speeches, which are not from the six classics, also serve to solve problems.

¹⁷³ *SJ* 126. 3197.

2.2 Scale and Structure

Shi ji is the first comprehensive historical work in China. It begins with the “Annals of Five Thearchs” from the mythical times and ends in Sima’s adulthood, 122 B.C.E., covering the whole of traceable and knowable history up to that point. Its last chapter is a history of the Sima lineage. This feature of temporal comprehensiveness is visible not only in the general structure but also in its three levels. As mentioned earlier, “The Basic Annals” are devoted to dynasties and their rulers; “Hereditary Houses” record the rise and decline of influential families on the second level; the last section describes significant individuals at the lowest level. The second and third levels supporting the top, constitute a pyramidal representation of the political world. Each chapter on the three levels introduces subjects and characters more or less chronologically from their rise until their decline. Many chapters open with their subject’s name and native place.¹⁷⁴ Some go on to trace a character’s ancestry¹⁷⁵ and lineage¹⁷⁶, as in the “The Hereditary House of Confucius.” In many cases, the beginning also offers a short story from the character’s youth. The best example is “The Biography of Li Si” 李斯列傳. At the very beginning, a short episode about Li Si’s thoughts about rats living in a granary and those living in the

¹⁷⁴ It does not necessarily mean where one was born but where one’s ancestral temples are located.

¹⁷⁵ There are many examples. One of them is “Qin benji” 秦本紀 (The Basic Annals of Qin), *SJ* 5. 173. It begins with introducing their ancestors.

¹⁷⁶ “The Treatise on Feng and Shan Sacrifices” (*SJ* 28) and “The Basic Annals of Yin” (*SJ* 4).

latrines follows an account of his name and family background: “Li Si was a native of Shangcai.” The story right afterward goes: when he was young, he was a minor functionary in the local administration. He saw that the rats in the latrines of the functionaries’ quarters ate refuse and would be terrified by people and dogs; in contrast, he observed that rats in the granary had a fundamentally different life. They ate grain, lived under a great portico and were not bothered by people and dogs. Li Si therefore concluded that being worthy or not depended on the environment one places himself in.

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A second point to be noted is the book’s horizontal comprehensiveness: in the horizontal direction, its diverse subjects and extensive spatiality. Eight treatises cover a wide range of topics, all related to government. Although not all of them are extant and a few chapters are partly or wholly by Chu Shaosun, their titles tell readers their presumed contents, all of which are about running a regime in ancient China. Additionally, instead of focusing merely on the Han regime, *Shi ji* also has five biographies devoted to people that Han Chinese considered barbarians, surrounding the central plain in different directions. These peripheral groups were the Xiongnu 匈奴, Nan Yue 南越 (Southern Yue), Dong Yue 東越 (Eastern Yue), Koreans 朝鮮, and Xinan yi 西南夷 people of the southwest.

¹⁷⁷ “The Biography of Li Si” (*SJ* 87) and Goldin’s *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy*, 66-67. I also discuss this chapter in Chapter 5 in this project, see 5.4 Coherence and Development of the Character, 281.

Shi ji's universal timeline and wide spatiality set up a broad framework of a political world. A complicated network of events is further interwoven with complex causal relationships, another aspect of the *Shi ji*'s encyclopedic feature.

2.3 Network of Complicated Causality and Events

Early Chinese writings are concerned with the problems of discontinuity between nature and culture, tensions between humanity and divinity, creation and transgression. As Michael J. Puett summarizes, the sagely kings are passive followers of Heaven in the Western Zhou model. Later philosophers, such as Confucius, Mohist, and Xunzi attempted to conceive of nature as a spontaneous and generative process, but it became harder to explain historical process by applying this theory.¹⁷⁸

As a comprehensive history that presents the all preceding historical changes and dynastic changes, *Shi ji* has no choice but to join the debate on the relationship between Heaven and human beings. Its encyclopedic character is revealed not only by its magnificent structure and diverse subjects, but also by its analyses of causality in historical events, including the endeavors of individuals and the involvement of Heaven. Other factors that influenced the course of history are also included in the text, such as previous events, the environment, and accidents. Success, defeat, and historical development depend on support from Heaven, one's own efforts, accidental factors and

¹⁷⁸ Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 140.

so on. Everyone involved in the political world is influenced by these three factors. They are not mutually exclusive, but compatible with each other. *Shi ji* presents a universal political world where these factors interplay.

What *Shi ji* presents is a network that comprises of various lines of causality. In “Letter in Reply to Ren An,” Sima claims that the composition of *Shi ji* was a matter of weaving a network of the old stories.¹⁷⁹ When all of the 130 chapters in *Shi ji* were written on thousands of bamboo slips, packaged into a great many rolls, it would have been difficult to read them. However, this did not prevent the ambitious historian from framing the work to be read as a whole. In other words, it is problematic to assume that because the historian was aware of the difficulty in reading the whole, *Shi ji* was designed for selective reading. In contrast, the historian often reminds his readers that more information about a certain event can be found in other chapters. Meanwhile, how a reader would read it is actually another issue. As I have mentioned above, since individual chapters are comprehensive on a smaller scale, the *Shi ji* actually helps the readers select what to read. They can decide how much they would like to know while being aware of the fact that events and lines of causations are interrelated.

¹⁷⁹There are two versions of the letter, one in the *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*) and the other one in *Wen xuan* 文選 (*Literary Selections*). Here I cite the version in the *Hanshu*. See *Han shu* 62.2735. [僕竊不遜，近自託於無能之辭，網羅天下放失舊聞，考之行事，稽其成敗興壞之理，凡百三十篇。] “Although I am not worthy, I have entrusted my meaning to powerless phrases, making a network of ancient traditions which were abandoned and lost under the heaven, investigating conduct and events, and examining their principles of success and failure, rise and decline, in 130 chapters.”

Two kinds of historical causes are crucial in *Shi ji*: messages from Heaven and the endeavors of individuals. Scholars hold different opinions on their significance in historical changes and the relationships between them, such as which has stronger effects, whether they are compatible, and especially what Sima's theory is regarding historical changes.¹⁸⁰ One theory that Sima was certainly aware of is attributed to Zou Yan 鄒衍 (? 305-240 B.C.E.). It interprets that each dynasty as being characterized by a particular virtue; the dynasties then replace one another in a repeating cycle. Durrant interprets Sima Qian's belief in cyclical transformation, Durrant interprets it as fatalistic. He contends that, although Sima Qian did have a few common principles of historical transformation, he had not worked out a "consistently applied ideology of history."¹⁸¹

Watson studies the historical theory of Sima Qian from a different perspective. He argues that Sima did not give Heaven a consistent role in his history. His examples, including the collapse of the state of Wei before the Qin's unification, the supernatural factors in the rise of Liu Bang, and the tragic defeat of Xiang Yu show that Sima "seems rather to let himself be drawn along by his narrative, sighing in sympathy, moralizing or chiding as the mood strikes him, and proclaiming quite the opposite when another mood

¹⁸⁰ Wen Chongyi 文崇一 (1925-) contends that Sima Qian followed the argument of his master Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.E.) that there is a perfect response between Heaven and man. However, Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 disagrees with this interpretation and holds that Sima was not a follower of his master, although he did study with Dong. See Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 125-26.

¹⁸¹Ibid, 127.

is upon him.”¹⁸² Watson further shows that all classical Chinese historians faced a dilemma. On one hand, if they made determinism or fatalism the message of Heaven, others would blame them for ignoring crucial human factors; on the other hand, if historians frankly described a ruler’s failings or a dynasty’s decline, they would put themselves in danger by angering their monarch. Accordingly, Sima and other historians in later dynasties tended to use “veiled words” that would not offend their emperor.

Watson’s argument regarding Sima Qian’s inclusion of both factors, Heaven and man, are rather passive. It leads to his failure in connecting the work’s comprehensiveness with the respect to causality with its structure and subjects. Events and characters were never separated but all interrelated to some degree in the *Shi ji*. This might not be a passive choice, but an active decision. At least, the work presents its encyclopedic character in many aspects. The interplay of Heaven and Human is one of them.

In contrast to the debatable role of Heaven in history, there has long been a consensus about the significant role of individuals’ endeavor in the *Shi ji*. Li Wai-yee is one of the scholars who painstakingly concentrates on human effort in historical development. She writes that “moral judgment is possible only when one recognizes the reality of human responsibility” and that the former serves as a foundation for Sima Qian to interpret the historical events and changes on moral standards. She goes on to argue

¹⁸² Watson, *Ssu-ma Chi’en*, 144.

that unlike Dong Zhongshu who used the “will of Heaven”¹⁸³ consistently to read history, “such determinist ideas exist only as faint and vague echoes in the *Records*.”¹⁸⁴ Based on these discussions, Li concludes that Sima Qian “reconciles the contradictions between these two levels of causality—historical destiny and individual endeavor—by affirming the meaning of history writing. This process thereby becomes the basis of the historian’s authority.”¹⁸⁵

This notion of the role that humans playing in the process of history is also discussed in detail by Puett. He contends that “the action of creation, for Sima Qian, is ambivalent”.¹⁸⁶ creation is necessary for the emergence of anything new, but it always involves discontinuity. The political actions and policies of the key figures, such as the First Emperor, Chao Cuo 晁錯 (? - 154 B.C.E.), and Emperor Wu, offer Puett the hints to understanding the attitude of Sima Qian toward the creation of empire. In the historian’s representation of the Qin and Han dynasties, whether to continue the old-fashioned enfeoffment system or pursue the innovative centralized administration that was the most important and controversial issue for several rulers in this period. Puett, by examining this reconstruction of the empire’s rise in *Shi ji*, argues that Sima believed the First Emperor and Emperor Wu’s centralized administrative structure was necessary, but his portrayals of creation are always tragic because these implements of creation are

¹⁸³ Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi (Records of the Historian)*,” 401.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 403.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 405.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 214.

transgressive.¹⁸⁷ Here too, by including contradictory facets of the same issue, the text attains its encyclopedic character.

Acknowledging humans' responsibility for their actions paves the way for arguing that historians have the authority to make moral judgments. Nevertheless, it is noted that the "will of Heaven" is not faint but tangible in the *Shi ji*. Many places use belief in destiny to account for events. In addition, whether the intentions of Heaven and individuals' endeavors are contradictory is an open question. History is produced under the influence of both Heaven and the human. Heaven is not necessarily an antagonist of heroes.

The best examples to analyze this subject are the "Basic Annals" of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang.¹⁸⁸ Liu and Xiang competed for supreme power in the chaotic period before the Han was established. This section will focus on the two contrasting chapters in which the boundary between Heavenly and human factors is not clear. Liu's success and Xiang's defeat result from interplay between Heaven and the human. It can be seen most clearly in three places where the two chapters correspond. The first of these is the legend of Liu's birth and the remarkable string of victorious military actions by Xiang; the second consists of two scenes where Liu and Xiang analyze their victory and defeat respectively; the third is the historian's judgments at the end of these two chapters.

¹⁸⁷ See Puett, *Ambivalence of Creation*, 181-212.

¹⁸⁸ For further discussion of these two chapters, see Li Changzhi's *Sima Qian zhi renga yu fengge*, 270-82; and Durrant's *Cloudy Mirror*, 130-43.

Many places in “The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” describe his valor and great ability on the battlefield. Xiang once defeated a united force of 560,000 soldiers, composed of Liu’s and five vassals’ armies. On a few dangerous occasions, Liu almost lost his life to an attack by Xiang. Xiang’s military talents contributed to his leadership and military power, but his extraordinary military ability could not guarantee his success. He evaded Liu for several years until he was finally surrounded at Gaixia. His final moment was heroic. Xiang, with a handful of followers, escaped a close siege. However, he knew the end was near, so he gave up his plan of crossing the Wu River to stage a comeback and attributed his defeat to Heaven:

天之亡我，我何渡為！且籍與江東子弟八千人渡江而西，今無一人還，縱江東父兄憐而王我，我何面目見之？縱彼不言，籍獨不愧於心乎？

Because heaven is destroying me what good would it do me to cross the river? Once, with eight thousand young men from the land east of the river, I crossed over and marched west, but today not a single one of them returns. Even if their fathers and brothers east of the river should take pity on me and make me their king, how could I bear to face them again? Though they said nothing of it, could I help feeling shame in my heart?¹⁸⁹

Was Xiang’s defeat entirely due to Heaven? The answer of course is no. The evaluative comment at the end of the chapter reads:

太史公曰：吾聞之周生曰“舜目蓋重瞳子”，又聞項羽亦重瞳子。羽豈其苗裔邪？何興之暴也！夫秦失其政，陳涉首難，豪傑蜂起，相與并爭，不可勝數。然羽非有尺寸，乘執起隴畝之中，三年，遂將五諸侯滅秦，分裂天下，而封王侯，政由羽出，號為“霸王”，位雖不終，近古以來未嘗有也。及羽背關懷楚，放逐義帝而自立，怨王侯叛己，難矣。自矜功伐，奮其私智而不

¹⁸⁹ *SJ* 7. 336.

師古，謂霸王之業，欲以力征經營天下，五年卒亡其國，身死東城，尚不覺寤而不自責，過矣。乃引“天亡我，非用兵之罪也”，豈不謬哉！

The Grand Historian says: I have heard Master Zhou say that “It would seem that Emperor Shun probably had eyes with double pupils.” I have also heard that Xiang Yu, too, had eyes with double pupils. Could it be that Xiang Yu was a descendant of Shun? How sudden was his rise to power! When Qin lost its political power, Chen She first challenged it. Local strongmen arose like a swarm of bees, competing with each other for power in numbers too great to be counted! Xiang Yu did not have an inch of land. Taking advantage of the circumstances, he rose from a commoner in the fields. In three years, he led five feudal lords to wipe out the Qin, divided up the empire and enfeoffed various kings and lords. Policies came from Xiang. He proclaimed himself Hegemon. Even though this position did not come to an end naturally, since ancient times [such a precipitous rise] had never happened. He was blamed at the time for turning his back on the [treaty] of the [Hangu] Pass and harboring his nostalgia for Chu, banishing the Righteous Emperor and establishing himself, and resenting the kings and lords who rebelled against him. He boasted of his achievements, relied on his own wisdom and never learnt from the ancients. He declared his enterprise to be that of Hegemon and hoped to conquer and rule all under Heaven by force. In five years, he lost his kingdom and died at Dongcheng, yet remained unaware and failed to blame himself for [his own mistakes]. It is his fault. Yet, he quoted the line ‘It is Heaven that destroys me, not [my own] fault in using my army.’ Isn’t that an error!”¹⁹⁰

In spite of the fact that this final assessment points out a few serious faults of Xiang Yu, it does not mean that aid from Heaven did not play a role in his rise. It analyzes Xiang Yu’s unprecedentedly rapid rise. Among the numerous local heroes, Xiang started with nothing but made astonishing achievements in an extremely short time. In three years, under his leadership, the Qin Empire was annihilated. All policies came from him, the Hegemon King. However, the situation dramatically changed later on account of human factors. He missed several good opportunities without being aware of

¹⁹⁰ *SJ* 7. 338.

them. The banquet at Hongmen is a good example. Xiang invited Liu to his cantonment for a banquet, planning to kill Liu and gain the territory of Qin that was occupied by Liu. However, Liu sophisticatedly explained why he entered the capital of Qin before Xiang. Therefore, Liu successfully escaped from danger. Also, Xiang did not master all the aspects of the art of warfare but in seventy early battles he was seldom defeated. The whole picture of Xiang's life is not entirely the result of human causality.

The second half of the comment focuses on the human causes of Xiang's ultimate defeat. It briefly lists the gross faults of which he was unaware at all: his failure to heed good advice from others and to learn from history, his cruelty to the surrendered soldiers of Qin, his overwhelming belief in simply using violence and in his own competence to solve problems. One can find more mistakes made by Xiang Yu which were caused by his personality and ruling theory in this chapter. These factors altogether resulted in his defeat. His fate was, thus, not totally determined by Heaven. From these two perspectives, the assessment of the historian not only includes human causes but also Heaven's influence.

Some scholars believe that "The Basic Annals of Gaozu" is parallel in the structure to "The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu."¹⁹¹ It depicts several legendary scenes

¹⁹¹ Li Changzhi proposed the principle of contrast in the composition of *Shi ji*. See his *Sima Qian zhi renga yu fengge*, 282. Zhang Dake 張大可 has a subsection in the chapter "How Sima Qian Construct Characters" in *Shi ji yanjiu* 史記研究. He shows many examples of using contrast to portray characters. The first one he mentions is the basic annals of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, 486-88. Durrant, in the chapter

involving Liu Bang. The first is his unusual birth: Liu's mother was resting on the bank of a pond and dreamt that she encountered a god. When Liu's father went looking for her, he saw a scaly dragon over the place where she was lying. Then, she became pregnant with Liu Bang.¹⁹² Such "uncommon birth" tropes of emperors are frequent in *Shi ji* and other historical works. The goal is usually to explain an emperor's legitimacy. What makes these scenes different is that Sima Qian included several other mysterious episodes concerning Liu and Liu himself was very happy with them and believed that he was different from average people.

This notion is further supplemented by several scenes later in the chapter. When Liu was acting as village head, he once returned to his fields. His wife (who later became Empress Lü) was weeding with her two children. An old man passed by, asked for water to drink, and examined her face. He said she would become the most honored woman in the world because of her son. Liu arrived just after the old man went away. His wife told him what the old man had said and remarked that the old man could not have walked far. When Liu caught up with him, the old man said that Liu's face was so outstanding that he could not express it in words. Liu replied that he would surely not forget his kindness if (as this episode implies) he reached great heights.

"Ideologue Versus Narrator," compares three parallel narratives in these two chapters, see Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 131-43.

¹⁹² This summary is based on contents of "The Basic Annals of Gaozu." See *SJ* 8. 341.

Another example is that the First Emperor of Qin repeatedly declared that there were signs in the southeastern sky indicating the presence of a “Son of Heaven.” He therefore decided to journey east to suppress this threat. Suspecting that he was the cause of the First Emperor’s expedition, Liu went into hiding among the rocky wastes of the mountains. Surprisingly, his wife was always able to find him because clouds assembled over his location. Liu was very pleased and overconfident. He was therefore held in awe by his followers.

Moreover, his belief in predestination was evidently revealed in his final moment. After he left his hometown and arrived in the capital, an arrow wound sustained in fighting against Jing Bu became more serious. When the best physician said that it was curable, Liu scolded: “I took over the [empire] from a commoner with a three-*chi*¹⁹³ sword. Isn’t it the Mandate of Heaven? My destiny depends on Heaven. Even if Bian Que¹⁹⁴ [were here], he would not be of any benefit.”¹⁹⁵ In other words, if Heaven indicates that the time to die has come, Liu will accept it.

Such legendary episodes indicate that Heaven chose Liu Bang to establish a new dynasty. Meanwhile, other episodes in this chapter, on the other hand, suggest that the founder’s rise and success were due to human action. After Liu took the throne and set up

¹⁹³ Unit of length in Qin and Han. One *chi* approximately equals 23 cm.

¹⁹⁴ Bian Que 扁鵲 was the earliest known Chinese physician according to legends. His medical skills were so amazing that the people gave him the same name as the legendary doctor Bian Que, from the time of Huang Di.

¹⁹⁵ *SJ* 8. 391.

the capital in Luoyang, he arranged a banquet in the Southern Palace in Luoyang. He asked his followers why he had succeeded and why Xiang Yu had failed. Disagreeing with them, he said:

公知其一，未知其二。夫運籌策帷帳之中，決勝於千里之外，吾不如子房。鎮國家，撫百姓，給餽饗，不絕糧道，吾不如蕭何。連百萬之軍，戰必勝，攻必取，吾不如韓信。此三者，皆人傑也，吾能用之，此吾所以取天下也。項羽有一范增而不能用，此其所以為我擒也。

You know the first [level] but do not know the second [level]. In terms of divining in the tents and defeating [the enemy] a thousand miles away, I am inferior to Zifang; in terms of guarding the state, comforting people, providing food and keeping the routes of resupply, I am inferior to Xiao He; in terms of gathering millions of soldiers, certain victory in battle, and certain success when attacking a city, I am inferior to Han Xin. These three people are all outstanding. That I knew how to lead them is why I was able to take over the empire. Xiang Yu had Fan Zeng but failed to use him. That is why he was apprehended by my [soldiers].¹⁹⁶

Liu's intelligence and his ability to accept good advice from others are richly documented throughout the *Shi ji*. His own analysis of his success suggests that his own endeavors also contributed to his success. Neither of the two chapters excludes either the intention of Heaven or the power of the individual. These causes are, in many cases, intertwined. *Shi ji* sometimes emphasizes one while overlooking the other, and on occasion stresses still other factors. This is because the book works through case studies and analysis. It shifts its perspective in different contexts, and is therefore able to emphasize diverse lessons. Prefaces to tables, annals and narratives suggest that an individual's rise and fall or success and failure are seldom due to one factor but usually to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 381.

interactions among them. Details of events in *Shi ji* serve to tell *how* historical changes were made, rather than providing a single consistent historical pattern that can be applied to every historical event. Chapter 4 discusses this issue in depth.

In addition to the role of Heaven and efforts of human beings, other factors, such as accidents and interactions among events, also influence the direction of history. In the case of “The Biography of the Southwestern Barbarians,” the unfolding narrative often arises out of events in the past or even accidents. Emperor Wu once successfully unified the barbarian groups in peripheral areas in the southwest.¹⁹⁷ The turning-point resulted from a type of berry sauce, called *jujiang* 枸醬.¹⁹⁸ The magistrate of Fanyang 番陽, Tang Meng 唐蒙, was sent to the Kingdom of Nan Yue as an imperial envoy to persuade its king to remain loyal to Han. While Tang was at court, he was served this sauce. When he asked where it came from, he was told that it was from Shu 蜀 and was shipped to the Kingdom of Nan Yue on the Zangke River. No one was aware of the fact that this causal comment actually disclosed the important military secret that there was a water route to the Kingdom of Nan Yue, providing an easier route for the attacking army than climbing over mountains. Later, in response to a memorial that Tang sent to Emperor Wu proposing a campaign against Nan Yue, troops were sent. The sauce finally led to the extension of Han’s control over the Southwestern region.

¹⁹⁷ 105 B.C.E.

¹⁹⁸ 史記集解, vol. 9, 3605. According to Pei Yin 裴駰 (fl. 438), a commentator of *Shi ji*, there is a type of tree called “jumu” 枸木. Its leaves can be made into tasty jam.

Another example is about the extension of the Han to the Kingdom of Dian 滇. It not only shows the potential power of accidents, but also suggests that events are mutually related. The well-known Han explorer Zhang Qian 張騫 (195-114 B.C.E.)¹⁹⁹ saw fabrics from Shu and bamboo from barbarian regions of Qiong when he was sent on a mission to the Kingdom of Daxia 大夏. He was told that the merchandise was bought from the Kingdom of Shendu 身毒²⁰⁰, where Shu merchants had their shops. Therefore, Emperor Wu sent envoys to search for the Kingdom of Shendu. It originally had nothing to do with the Kingdom of Dian until the envoys passed there on their way to the Kingdom of Shendu. The emperor only began to pay attention to it after some envoys went back to the Han court and reported to him. Later, the Han started its military campaign against the southwest and defeated several local kings. The king of Dian therefore surrendered to the Han with all his people and requested that the Han court to send officials to govern his territory. Zhang Qian's accidental observation and the interrelations among these events eventually led to the incorporation of the Kingdom of Dian 滇's territory into the Han.

Admittedly, the ambition of Emperor Wu began before his military actions in the Southwest. One might suspect that both Tang and Zhang intended to flatter Emperor Wu

¹⁹⁹ Zhang was an imperial envoy to the west of China's central plain, in the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (141-87 B.C.E.). His travels, associated with the Silk Road, contributed significantly to trade and communication between these regions and Han China.

²⁰⁰ Modern India.

by satisfying his ambition of exploring the southwest. Their observations, however, provoked a sequence of military actions, negotiations, and other political issues. The trivial observations of Tang and Zhang's concerning berry sauce and merchandise in a market led to unexpected and profound historical change: the emperor's interests in the Kingdom of Shendu were switched to Dian in the end and the latter finally became part of the Han.

This discussion of the historical changes shows that the patterns of causality in the *Shi ji* are presented in an encyclopedic and complicated manner. Various factors may explain the same events and these factors are not necessarily contradictory. Each of them may have different significances in explaining the past. It is hard to say that one cause predominates throughout the *Shi ji*, which realistically presents *how* events unfolded rather than by reducing everything to a clear, consistent and conclusive pattern.

2.4 Multiplicity of Meanings

Two other aspects suggest *Shi ji*'s encyclopedic character. One is the contradictions between different versions of one episode. The other is the multiplicity of meaning produced in one episode.

The Song scholar Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009-1066) pointed out that *Shi ji* employs a technique of organizing materials which subsequent scholars often called *hu xian fa* 互現法 (mutual illustration). He noticed, like many others, that information concerning a

historical personage is often distributed widely in other chapters in addition to his biography. He believed that, in order to protect the reputation of his protagonist by bring all his strengths into focus, Sima Qian assembles all the strong points of the protagonist into his biography, while distributing his weaknesses into other chapters. Take for example, Lian Po 廉頗, a famous general in Zhao in the reign of King Wen 趙文王 (r. 298-266 B.C.E.).²⁰¹ His own biography is filled with his merits, whereas his shortcomings appear in “The Biography of Zhao She.”²⁰² By assembling Lian’s strong points in his own biography and distributing his weak points in his contemporary’s biography, *Shi ji* protects his good reputation.

Li Wai-yee, disagreeing with Su Xun, gives a definition of *mutual illustration*: “an event or character is presented from different perspectives in different parts of the book.”²⁰³ Li also believes that political discretion is the real reason for employing mutual illustration. She uses the example of “The Basic Annals of Gaozu” and “The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” to suggest that “the principle of mutual illumination 互現法 is intrinsic to Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s impartiality and appreciation of the plurality of human existence.”

I would argue that this technique embodies the encyclopedic character of *Shi ji* rather than serving to protect the reputation of protagonists. First, it enables readers to

²⁰¹ Also known as King Huiwen of Zhao 趙惠文王.

²⁰² *SJ* 81.

²⁰³ Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shi ji*,” 395.

know a character from different perspectives. Second, as discussed in previous sections, the interrelated causes and effects prompt readers to learn what is not mentioned in his own biography. In other words, the information about a character omitted from in his or her biography plays important causal roles elsewhere. It is understandable that not all information about historical figures is included in their biographies. In many cases, an event involves several characters. This event may play a crucial role in the life of one character but not the others. Thus the distribution of data is rational. For example, not all of Liu Bang's actions are put in his Basic Annals. Instead, his interactions with his followers are distributed among the chapters devoted to these generals and ministers.

If we call “mutual illumination” a “supplementary type” of multiplicity of meanings, another type may be called the “contradictory type,” in which different versions of the same event appear in various chapters of the *Shi ji*. These contradictions may be due to the ambiguous resources at Sima Qian's disposal, as Hardy painstakingly argues. He further holds that the objective use of these contradictions increased the historian's authority.²⁰⁴ As mentioned previously, whether Sima Qian intended to include multiple versions of the same story is uncertain. The arrangement of materials affords readers access to a multiplicity of plausible reconstructions of the past. As we have seen, significant events always have more than one cause. In this sense, the contradictions in the *Shi ji* present an encyclopedic history rather than any reductive versions.

²⁰⁴ See Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo*, 79-85.

The third type of multiplicity is that one narrative may convey more than one lesson. A majority of biographies in the *Shi ji* are narratives. Many traditional *Shi ji* scholars, such as Li Changzhi and Stephen Durrant, try to infer Sima Qian's intentions and how he implies them in his book. They always take their evidence from "The Letter in Reply to Ren An" 报任安书 and the Postface of *Shi ji*²⁰⁵. We have almost no sources of information about Sima Qian and his father except these two pieces — but their reliability is open to question.²⁰⁶ Even if they were by Sima Qian, his writings tell us only a little about his intentions. He never gave specific answers to many important questions, such as: Who are his target readers? What is his estimation of Liu Bang? Were that appear to be satires intended as such? Even if he did, he was no longer the controller of the text, because the participation of readers in decoding the text determines that interpretations of the same work can be different. In the case of *Shi ji*, it means that readers' take-away does not necessarily match Sima's goals and expectations.

Why can different meanings be extracted from one narrative in the *Shi ji*? In other words, why do excellent scholars who agree on the events and situations depicted disagree about their interpretation? A large portion of *Shi ji* consists of narratives. This important feature enables us to approach the work from a narrative perspective, taking advantage of Genette's structural analysis of common features of narrative. Then, how narrative, as a

²⁰⁵ *SJ* 130.

²⁰⁶ Klein, "The History of A Historian," 446-451.

form to present history, influences the conveyance of meaning becomes a crucial question.

Understanding a narrative means more than being able to summarize it; in fact, it means being able to figure out the message embedded in it. This is particularly true for early Chinese historiography. David Schaberg analyzes the function of anecdotes in early Chinese historical writings. The early function of anecdotes is already implicit in their persistent didacticism in the way they are framed for display in texts like the *Huainanzi*, and in the phenomenon of loosely related sets of versions. This body of lore existed for the sake of substantiating arguments about the workings of the world, particularly the political world. It was for the sake of understanding and carrying such arguments that new users learned the lore and in their turn passed it on, and it was for the same reason that users ultimately committed some of the lore to writing, either demonstrating its proper use in recounted speeches and essays or compiling useful treasuries of anecdotes.²⁰⁷

Gerald Prince argues that “one way of accounting for the multiple interpretations that a single narrative (or nonnarrative) can yield is to consider the interpretive context.”²⁰⁸ Diverse readers differently connect proposition with the reception context of a narrative. The amount of processing required also leads the reader to draw different

²⁰⁷ Schaberg, “Chinese History and Philosophy” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1 Beginning to AD 600*, 398.

²⁰⁸ Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22(1) (Spring 1988): 1-8.

propositions. Prince uses the example of “Little Red Riding Hood” to illustrate how readers can receive different messages from the same narrative. “Narrative pragmatics,” according to Prince, refers to “the cognitive and communicative factors, affecting the processing, tellability, suitability, and value of narratives.”²⁰⁹ In the case of “Little Red Riding Hood,” one may conclude that it is dangerous to stop and listen to a stranger; others may conclude that wasting time in reaching a goal is dangerous because the wolf persuaded the little girl to take the longest way to grandma’s house. One may reach still other conclusions. These differences are due to the readers’ diverse contexts of reception. The reader decides what aspects to focus on and then on the nature of that text.

It is natural that readers of the *Shi ji* take away different implications from the same narrative. Sima Qian may have wanted his readers to come away with a particular interpretation, or more than one of them; we cannot be certain. The fact remains that his writings indicate multiple meanings. Inferring what Sima Qian wanted us to believe and what clear patterns he wanted to present is not important, when we become aware of the fact that the nature of narratives in historical writing determines that it is impossible for the readers to extract the same lessons from the same text. Therefore, we should give up inferring the intentions of Sima Qian. The direction of study should be switched to the text *per se*. In this case, it is more worthwhile and rewarding to explore how narratives convey meanings and how meanings are influenced by the structure of narratives.

²⁰⁹ Prince, “Narrative Pragmatics Message and Point,” 529.

Readers extract contradictory implications from different narratives and same narratives, too. This is particularly true for historical writings. Li Si 李斯 (? 284-208 B.C.E.), the Prime Minister of Qin before and after its unification of China, having done much to satisfy the First Emperor's ambition, was paramount among the ministers. The eunuch, Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 207 B.C.E.), was the Director of the Office of Palace Chariots²¹⁰ and concurrently Acting Director of the Office of the Imperial Seals and Tallies²¹¹. He was familiar with rules and laws and close to the First Emperor. Fusu 扶蘇 (d. 210 B.C.E.) was the eldest son of the First Emperor. He had been sent to the frontier because of irritating his father where his trusted general Meng Tian 蒙恬 (?-210B.C.E.) camped, when the First Emperor was making his last circuits through his empire. Li Si, Zhao Gao and, a younger son Huhai 胡亥 (230-207 B.C.E.) accompanied.

When they arrived at a place called Sand Hill 沙丘, the First Emperor fell ill and passed away unexpectedly. A letter dedicated by the emperor of transmitting the throne to Fusu had been sealed but not given to a messenger to reach Fusu. Zhao intended to enthrone Huhai instead of Fusu for his own sake, because he was favored by Huhai. Zhao once taught Huhai writing and laws and decided to take advantage of this close relationship. He first talked to Huhai and used historical examples to dispel Huhai's misgivings about a nobleman's virtues as a son and a brother. He also impressed upon

²¹⁰ Zhong che fu ling, 中車府令.

²¹¹ Xing fu xi ling, 行符璽令.

Huhai that this great opportunity would never come again. After Huhai consented, Zhao Gao approached Li Si. Zhao used historical examples and allusions and allured him with the promise that their cooperation would secure not only his but also his descendants' power and wealth. Although Li Si rejected Zhao's plan five times, he finally failed to escape from Zhao's trap and obeyed him.²¹²

The first implication drawn from this chapter is possibly that one should not be greedy for power. Greedy people are easily controlled by others because they cannot refuse temptation. Li Si, in this narrative, eager to retain his influence at the court and ennoble all his offspring, was trapped by Zhao Gao's scheme. A second lesson is that the transition from one ruler to another is the shakiest period. Many potential factors may cause disaster. Thus the First Emperor should have ensured that his eldest son, Fusu, received the edict concerning the transition. A third conclusion would be that eunuchs should be strictly isolated from political issues. Even if they do not hold powerful positions, as intimates of emperors, they know their secrets and can take advantage of their close relationship with the emperor. Zhao Gao held the imperial seals. His conspiracy changed the direction of the Qin Empire. If Fusu had been enthroned, the history of Qin might have been different. Still more implications are possible. For example, family relationships are sometimes weaker than the temptations of power.

²¹² Goldin, *After Confucius*, 72-73.

Huhai, who knew what is right as a son and a younger brother, still could not stick to righteous principles and agreed to the plan in the end.

Readers extract different points from the same episode. In addition to Prince's emphasis on reading context, I would argue that the multiplicity of factors leading to one event is likely to produce a multiplicity of messages. The above example shows that Zhao Gao's sophistication and glib persuasion resulted in the success of this conspiracy. A second conclusion, namely that Huhai's and Li Si's moral sense were feeble, also holds water. In the *Shi ji*'s narrative, all the above factors contributed to the event of Huhai's enthronement and Fusu's suicide. We readers learn a complicated history, rather than a simplified version that emphasizes a certain cause and ignores all the rest. The account is so inclusive and complicated that *Shi ji* never tells its readers what specific lesson it intends to teach.

CHAPTER 3

TEMPORAL ORDER & CAUSALITY

This chapter explores the establishment of causality in the *Shi ji* by comparing the temporal order of succession of events in the story and the pseudo-temporal order of their arrangement in the narratives in the *Shi ji*. The discordances between these two temporal orders are crucial for examining the textual manipulations by our Grand Historian, Sima Qian. I argue that Sima set up an extraordinarily complicated network of causalities in the *Shi ji* by linking events in various ways. Although the historian's manipulation of narrative order may suggest his understanding of historical process, the goal of this chapter is neither to speculate *what* his intentions nor his philosophy are. Instead, I focus on *how* events in the text are linked and how such juxtapositions impinge on a reader's interpretation of them.

The accounts in the sections of "Basic Annals," "Hereditary Houses," and "Biographies" present numerous anecdotal narratives, representing the rise and decline of a ruler, an empire, a state, or an individual's life experience. The main exposition in these sections is arranged in chronological order. But the many exceptions to this principle help to set up a complicated network of causality. I use specific examples of such exceptions to show how the temporal order of the narratives impacts the cause and effects of episodes within a given account. This chapter is concerned only with temporal analysis.

Non-chronological orders influenced by other factors, such as the organization and structure of a chapter, will not be considered here.

I shall first introduce two significant definitions related to temporal orders in narrative analysis: story order and narrative order. After the introduction of three types of narrative orders and the relationship between orders and causalities, I move on to discussing the narratives in the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*. For the sake of a clear comparison between these works, I first examine the causalities set up by prolepses and analepses in the *Zuo zhuan*. Its narratives rely heavily on divinations and dreams. In many cases, they themselves become the subjects, directly lead to a sequence, and thus simplify the causalities among its events. Examination of the four types of narrative orders in the *Shi ji*, in contrast, presents a remarkably complicated version of the past, since its connections among episodes are in various temporal relations. The rise and fall of rulers, imperial families, and prominent historical personages in the *Shi ji* suggest the complexity of history, but do not suggest a clear historical pattern.

3.1 Temporal Orders

“In both Chinese and Western historiographical traditions, narrative reorderings and manipulations are the tools which historians have always used to encode their own

judgments into their accounts.”²¹³ Histories arrange events. Historians set up direct or indirect connections between earlier and later events in various ways, inspiring their readers to contemplate the triggering of history. Shedding light on the links and causalities among these events, temporal order is therefore crucial for understanding the networks set up by the historians of the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*. Before moving on to these two fountainheads of Chinese historical writing, it is necessary to take a look at a few definitions and types of temporal orders from the perspective of narratology.

3.1.1 Narrative Order vs. Story Order

Narrative in the sense of verbal recounting, according to Genette, refers to the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself (the definition of narrative and its connotations are introduced in the Introduction.)²¹⁴ It includes narratives that tell stories in diverse forms, such as images in a movie or a comic strip and in oral or written languages. Their common feature is that these media have to present the events in a certain order. “One can run a film backwards, image by image, but one cannot read a text backwards, letter by letter, or even word by word, or even sentence by sentence, without it ceasing to be a text.”²¹⁵ Some may argue that we may skip or read a page or paragraph repetitively. But we still read forward, word by word, because we just go back to reread a

²¹³ Klein, “The History of a Historian,” 463.

²¹⁴ See 1.6.1 Definitions of Narrative and Narrator, 65.

²¹⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 34.

part and move on forward. This constrained reading order is due to the *linearity* of the linguistic signifier.

However, our reading order is not necessarily the order of a story or a series of stories, as it is pointed out by the French film theorist, Christian Metz (1931-1993):

Narrative is a ... doubly temporal sequence...: There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier). This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives (three years of the hero's life summed up in two sentences of a novel or in a few shots of a "frequentative" montage in film, etc.) More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme.²¹⁶

Based on this discussion, the temporal order of the signified is the story order. In contrast, the temporal order of the signifier is the narrative order. If they are identical, the latter then follows a chronological order; if they are not, then the latter is a distorted one, also known as pseudo-time.²¹⁷ It is noted that this is not the only situation when a narrative order differs from the story order. When telling a complicated event or a series of events, protagonists actually act or speak simultaneously at the same location or in different spaces. However, the narrator cannot present all their actions all at the same time. Therefore, in spite of their simultaneity, a narrator would have to describe one protagonist first and then go back to the same point on the timeline where he left off, and describe the actions of another figure starting at the same time as the first protagonist.

²¹⁶ Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York, 1974), 18. [Note: I have altered this translation slightly so as to align its terms with the terms used throughout this book.] Genette cited it in *Narrative Discourse*, 33.

²¹⁷ Pseudo-time refers to the presented sequence of narrative, including anticipation and flashback.

This is quite common in many historical writings. *Shi ji* is a typical case, as shown later in this chapter.

As Genette points out, “to study the temporal order of a narrative is to compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story, to the extent that story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferable from one or another indirect clue.”²¹⁸ The comparison between the two orders is based on two premises: technically speaking, these two orders are never the same, and readers are always informed if there are any non-chronological orders, as described by Genette,

reconstitution is most often not only possible, because in those texts narrative discourse never inverts the order of events without saying so, but also necessary, and precisely for the same reason: when a narrative segment begins with an indication like “Three months earlier,” we must take into account both that this scene comes after in the narrative, and that it is supposed to have come before in the story: each of these, or rather the relationship between them (of contrast or of dissonance), is basic to the narrative text, and suppressing this relationship by eliminating one of its members is not sticking to the text, but is quite simply killing it. Pinpointing and measuring these narrative anachronies (as I will call the various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative) implicitly assume the existence of a kind of zero degree that would be a condition of perfect temporal correspondence between narrative and story.²¹⁹

Events recounted in narratives are organized along a temporal axis. The duality of temporal orders involved in narratives yields two major possibilities: if the narrative follows the actual story order (the order of the actual sequence of events), it is

²¹⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 35.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

chronological; if the narrative order and the actual story order are different, it is prolepsis or analepsis. Of course, not all narratives offer clear clues about this relationship of two events described; however, this is not a serious problem for Chinese historical writings, which are always discreet on this issue.

The approach of Li Jixiang 李紀祥,²²⁰ who focuses on the relationship among time, history, and narrative in historical narratives, is similar to that of Genette in some respects, but different in others. The similarity is that they both argue that there are multiple orders involved in a narrative. Their difference is that Genette emphasizes the differences between story order and narrative order, whereas Li points out multiple orders exist in the narratives because each character has his or her own order in a narrative. To narrate a complicated event with at least two linear orders [two characters], the narrator has to go back and forth among various orders. He defines this type of narration as *zhuan shu* 轉述, “u-turn narration,” referring to a narration that requires going back to the order of the first character. He goes further: *zhuan shu* is possible in historical narratives because history is capable of being edited; and *zhuan shu* is necessary in narratives because one cannot recount two events at the same time. A counter example could be found in film. Normally, a narrative movie cannot tell two episodes at the same time either: it is possible only if the editor mutes the two episodes and includes them in one

²²⁰ Li, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 82-86.

shot. Sacrificing voice makes this narration possible. But it is impossible in a narrative in the form of a text.

Comparing Li and Genette's studies show that Genette tends to focus on the narrator's manipulations and the categories of the narratives resulting from the change of the timeline, whereas Li notes the nature and limitations of the narrating action *per se*. The former leads to more discussion of the goal and functions of this manipulation, while the latter clearly points out the narrator's technical necessity of going back and forth among simultaneous characters and various events.

3.1.2 Types of Temporal Order

According to the relation between narrative order and story order, there are two types of narrative orders: chronology and anachrony. Anachrony can be further divided into three types: simultaneous type, prolepsis, and analepsis which I will discuss in detail below.

The simultaneous type refers to a situation in which at least two events happen at the same time or whose durations overlap. For example, in one scene, several characters may act or speak at the same time in the same space. At other times, the author narrates different events or situations happening in more than one place. This type is very common in ambitious military narratives, in which the effects of complicated circumstances are produced by describing at least two armies acting at the same time but

in different places. Because the narrator cannot recount two actions or speeches of by different characters simultaneously, he presents one first and then the other, making the narrative order different from the story order. *Shi ji* includes many examples of this type, since it depicts political decisions and changes of circumstances in battles, which involve simultaneous actions by several parties. Here I will confine myself to the simple example of the Hongmen Banquet in the “Basic Annals of Xiang Yu.” I will discuss this type of order in section 4.2.2.

This scene is one of the most dramatic and significant incidents in Chinese history.²²¹ It describes the speeches and actions of several characters from two competing camps, Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 B.C.E.) and 劉邦 Liu Bang (247-195 B.C.E.), who are referred to as King Xiang and the Lord of Pei. Sima introduces characters involved in this event by stating their seating order. They are Xiang Yu, Lord Xiang 項伯 (Xiang Yu’s uncle), and Fan Zeng 范增 (Xiang Yu’s primary counselor, who always has extraordinary tactics). Therefore, Xiang Yu addresses Fan with the honorific *yafu* 亞父 (literally, the one who is second only to father). The background of this banquet is that the territorial lords agreed that the first one to enter Xianyang 咸陽, the capital of the vanquished Qin empire, would become the King of Guanzhong 關中.²²² Contrary to Xiang Yu’s

²²¹ Yu, “The seating order at the Hung Men banquet,” 60.

²²² Guanzhong 關中 refers to the plain of River Wei 渭河. Since there are four significant passes in the four directions of this area, it is called Guanzhong (the district within the passes). The four passes are

expectation, Liu entered Xianyang before him; enraged, he set up this banquet to murder

Liu. The scene reads:

項王、項伯東嚮坐。亞父南嚮坐。亞父者，范增也。沛公北嚮坐，張良西嚮侍。范增數目項王，舉所佩玉珪以示之者三，項王默然不應。范增起，出召項莊，謂曰：「君王為人不忍，若入前為壽，壽畢，請以劍舞，因擊沛公於坐，殺之。不者，若屬皆且為所虜。」莊則入為壽，壽畢，曰：「君王與沛公飲，軍中無以為樂，請以劍舞。」項王曰：「諾。」項莊拔劍起舞，項伯亦拔劍起舞，常以身翼蔽沛公，莊不得擊。²²³

King Xiang and Lord Xiang were seated facing east. *Yafu* [Fan Zeng] was seated facing south. *Yafu* is Fan Zeng. The Lord of Pei was seated facing north, and Zhang Liang served [Lord of Pei] facing west. Fan Zeng eyed Xiang Yu several times and lifted his jade pendant [in the form of a broken ring] to signal [to King Xiang] three times. King Xiang was silent and did not respond. Fan Zeng rose and went out [of the tent] to call Xiang Zhuang.²²⁴ [Fan] told him “[Our] Lord’s personality was kind-hearted. Enter and propose a toast before [them]. After finishing the toast, request [permission] to dance with a sword and thereupon attack the Lord of Pei where he sits and kill him. Otherwise, all of you will be captured.”

Zhuang therefore entered and did the toast. Completing the toast, he said “[Our] King is drinking with the Lord of Pei. There is no entertainment to enjoy. I therefore request permission to dance with a sword.”

King Xiang said, “I consent.” Xiang Zhuang drew his sword and began to dance. Lord Xiang also drew his sword and started to dance. He constantly used his own body to shield the Lord of Pei. Zhuang was not able to attack.

Regardless of who is acting, whether by speaking or dancing, all the other characters are there as well. This scene begins with the seating order of the major characters and then moves the focus on Fan Zeng. Since King Xiang does not respond to

the Hangu Pass 函谷關 the east, the Wu Pas in the south 武關, Dasan Pass 大散關 in the west, and the Xiao Pass 蕭關 in the north.

²²³ *SJ* 7, 312-13.

²²⁴ Xiang Zhuang is Xiang Yu’s cousin.

his signals, he attempts to assassinate Liu Bang on his own initiative. In this process, Sima describes the interactions between King Xiang and Fan. As readers, we are aware of the fact that Liu and Zhang are both there, as are Lord Xiang and Xiang Zhuang. Lord Xiang is well aware of the aim of this arranged banquet and therefore frequently protects Liu Bang during this sword dance.²²⁵ During the dance, all of these characters are present at the banquet at the same time, but because the narrator is restricted to one point of view, he has to introduce the characters to his reader one by one in sequence.

Genette states that “Every anachrony constitutes, with respect to the narrative into which it is inserted—onto which it is grafted—a narrative that is temporally second, subordinate to the first in a sort of narrative syntax that we met in the analysis we undertook above of a very short fragment from *Jean Santeuil*. We will henceforth call the temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined as such, ‘first narrative.’”²²⁶ This definition suggests two premises of analysis: there must be two narratives: a major one and a subordinate one; and when the latter ends, it connects with the first narrative.

Genette designates *prolepsis* as any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later, and designates *analepsis* as any

²²⁵ Xiangbo’s relationship with Liu Bang and Zhang Liang.

²²⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 48. *Jean Santeuil* is a French novel written by Marcel Proust (1871-1922) between 1896 and 1900. Genette’s narrative theory is based on a systematical analysis of this work from several perspectives. He refers to it as a precursor of Proust’s the most significant work, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of the Lost Time*), which was published between 1913 and 1927.

evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment, and reserves the general term *anachrony* to designate these discordances between temporal orders of story and narrative are not limited to analepsis and prolepsis.²²⁷ Although I follow Genette's categories in the current study, in historical writing, prolepsis is not necessarily an anachrony, since the invocation of later events may happen earlier, as shown in section 4.2.2. This is frequently exemplified in the many examples of military operations in the *Shi ji*. In spite of this disagreement, I count this type as prolepsis here for two reasons. One is that while sometimes a prediction of a later event sometimes happens earlier, it takes time for readers to understand, and even the historian himself might not realize its significance immediately. What happens more frequently is that we overlook the significance of a prediction until it is fulfilled. Because of its retrospective nature, it is not uncommon to see that some historical writings contain large number of invocations of earlier predictions in many forms. Their importance is recognized and incorporated into narratives by historians, leading to the other reason that historians, in order to produce certain effects, deliberately leak some information to their readers in advance. The latter possibly explains the large number of prolepses in the *Zuo zhuan*, where divinations and predictions are always fulfilled.

²²⁷ Ibid, 40.

An example in the *Shi ji* supports my argument. In the chapter “Basic Annals of Gaozu,” an old man comes to Liu Bang’s wife, who is merely a commoner weeding in a field at that point, but will later become Empress Lü. He examines her face and predicts that she will be “天下貴人” (most honored person in all under Heaven). When Liu Bang asks him to examine his face, the old man says, “君相貴不可言” (Your face is so noble that I cannot express it). This scene may have happened, but its significance was verified only after the ascendancy of Liu Bang. If Liu had been a village-head forever, the words of that old man would be worth nothing more than a joke.²²⁸

The last type of anachrony is analyses and their significance cannot be ignored.

An analepsis is used in the depictions of the career of Lord Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659-621B.C.E.) in the *Shi ji*. It reads:

(A) 九月壬戌，與晉惠公夷吾合戰於韓地。(B) 晉君棄其軍，與秦爭利，還而馬驚。(C) 繆公與麾下馳追之，不能得晉君，反為晉軍所圍。晉擊繆公，繆公傷。(D) 於是岐下食善馬者三百人馳冒晉軍，晉軍解圍，遂脫繆公而反生得晉君。(E) 初，繆公亡善馬，岐下野人共得而食之者三百餘人，吏逐得，欲法之。(F) 繆公曰：「君子不以畜產害人。吾聞食善馬肉不飲酒，傷人。」(G) 乃皆賜酒而赦之。(H) 三百人者聞秦擊晉，皆求從。(I) 從而見繆公寤，亦皆推鋒爭死，以報食馬之德。(J) 於是繆公虜晉君以歸，令於國，「齊宿，吾將以晉君祠上帝」。²²⁹

(A) On the day *renxu* of the ninth month, [Lord Mu of Qin] and Lord Hui of Jin started a battle at the place of Han. (B) The Lord of Jin abandoned his armies and contended for interests with Qin; when he returned, his horses got stuck in a bog. (C) Lord Mu and his followers chased the Lord of Jin in chariots but could not

²²⁸ *SJ* 8. 346.

²²⁹ *SJ* 5. 189.

catch him; instead, [they] were surrounded by the armies of Jin. Jin attacked Lord Mu and Lord Mu was wounded. (D) At that time, three hundred men from Mt. Qi who had eaten prize horses²³⁰ attacked the armies of Jin on horseback. The armies of Jin broke the encirclement. That let Lord Mu escape and thereupon [his army] captured the Lord of Jin alive. (E) Sometime earlier, Lord Mu lost some of his prize horse. There were more than three hundred rustics in the region of Mt. Qi who captured and ate [horse]. An official pursued, apprehended and was about to apply punish them. (F) Lord Mu said, “A noble man would not injure people because of his domestic animals. I heard that eating good horse flesh without drinking is harmful.” (G)[He] therefore bestowed wine on all of them and pardoned them. (H) When the three hundred men heard that Qin was going to attack Jin, they all asked to follow. Following the [Qin armies], they saw that Lord Mu was in an urgent situation. They also brandished their spears and fought to death in order to repay [Lord Mu’s] kindness. (J) Therefore, Lord Mu captured the Lord of Jin. [When he was about to] return to Qin, he circulated an order throughout the state: “Fasting through the night, I will sacrifice the Lord of Jin to the High Lord!”

I have marked each sentence in this episode with a letter from A to J. I then group them according to their themes. Sentences (A), (B), (C), and (D) describe the battle between the state of Jin and Qin. We are told that hundreds of people, who have eaten the meat of good horses, not only save Lord Mu of Qin from the encirclement by Jin, but also capture Lord Hui of Jin alive. (E)(F)(G) and (H) introduce an earlier event: Lord Mu of Qin waived punishment for those who ate the meat of his good horses and bestowed wine on them. (I) and (J) go back to the scene to the battlefield and inform us of the victory of Qin. This is the temporal order of the narrative, as defined in the last section. In other

²³⁰ The same story also appears in the “Fan lun xun” 汎論訓 (A Compendious Essay) in the *Huainan zi* 淮南子 (*The Writings of Master Huainan*), and in the “Ai shi” 愛士 (To Love the Gentleman) essay in the *Lü shi chun qiu* 呂氏春秋 (*The Annals of Spring and Autumn Annals by Master Lü*). In these two sources, the horse that Lord Mu lost was one of the four driving his chariot, referred to as *youfu* 右服. It is the third one from the left because the two middle ones were called 服.

words, the historian narrates the event in a distorted order. Restoring the actual sequences yields a different order, the story order.

(E)(F)(G) - (A)(B)(C)(D) - (H)(I)(J)

This order is not due to the historian's inability to represent the simultaneous actions of characters, or scenes happening in another different space, but to the narrator's ability to present an episode through analepsis without doing harm to the readers' understanding.

3.1.3 Order and Causality

Historians establish causality in several ways, such as by using conjunctions and suppositions.²³¹ Representing events in a certain order, chronology, simultaneity, prolepsis, and analepsis, are ways to set up logical connections among events distributed in various stages of a narrative. A good narrative always gives its readers or listeners clues at the right time. This narrative strategy is similar to shots in movies. For example, if a close-up of a gun is shown, we know that someone is going to use it at a certain point. This is important for the coherence of the movie. Likewise, if a narrator retells the same story but forgets to mention the gun until the character needs to find it to kill someone, his audience will call the narrator a failure. *Shi ji*'s manipulation of temporal order not

²³¹ By conjunctions, I mean the words or phrases used to connect two clauses or sentences, such as *suo yi ran zhe* 所以然者 (the reason for this was) and *gu* 故 (therefore). See my example in 1.6.4 Signs of Historian, 71.

only produces aesthetic effects, but also facilitates the establishment of causality among events. To quote Genette:

“To study the temporal order of a narrative is to compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story, to the extent that story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferable from one or another indirect clue.”²³²

As discussed in Chapter 1, causal relations are negligible in annals and chronicles, such as *Chun qiu*, because these contain merely barest entries for individual events. They follow a chronological rather than a logical order. The succinct character of *Chun qiu* even obscures potential causal linkages between two consecutive events in chronological order. For example, the first two entries in the third year of Lord Yin’s reign 隱公 (r.722-712. B.C.E.) read:

三年，春，王二月，己巳，日有食之。

Third year [of the reign], in spring, the royal second month. On *jisi* day, the sun was eclipsed.

三月，庚戌，天王崩。

In the third month, on *gengxu* day, the Heavenly king expired.²³³

Whether the death of King Ping of Zhou is related to the eclipse of the sun is unknown. It is possible that the eclipse was a sign of the death of a ruler. It is equally possible that the eclipse of the sun was irrelevant.

²³² Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 35.

²³³ ZZ, Yin 3, 49a &b. According to ZZ, this Heavenly King refers to King Ping of Zhou 周平王 (r. 770-720), but he died on the day of *renxu*, not *gengwu*. More discussion is in Legge’s Chinese Classics, *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen*, v. 5, 12.

In contrast, causality is significant in the *Shi ji* and *Zuo zhuan*. Responding to the three categories of relationship between narrative order and story order discussed earlier, these two works link events by manipulating temporal orders in a narrative in three ways to convey causes and effects. The first one, more implicit than the others, is to follow a chronological order. In other words, the narrative order is as the same as the story order: two successive events are connected not only chronologically but also logically, as the second event not only happens later but also depends on the completion of the first one. Another way to set up the causal relationship among episodes in a narrative is to distort the narrative order. Instead of following the chronological order, the historian either leaks some information about what will happen later, or conceals some information until he reaches a suitable moment to let the readers know what has happened earlier. This highlights the evocations and suspensions as factors leading to the consequence(s).

As is shown in the previous example of reading faces, the old man said Liu Bang would become extremely prominent after examining his face, suggesting that Liu's rise was predetermined.²³⁴ It not only adds mystery but also suggests fate as a reason for Liu's ascendancy to throne. In the example of Lord Mu of Qin, the first and second narratives are causally connected by beginning the second narrative with the word, *chu*, meaning "sometime earlier." This insertion suggests that Lord Mu's generosity is the reason why

²³⁴ Puett does not talk about fatalism. Instead, he attributes the successful foundation of the Han dynasty to the support of Liu Bang's followers. He promised that he would grant lands to his loyal followers. See *The Ambivalence of Creation*, 195.

defeat is turned into victory at the last minute. The narrative order in *Shi ji* sheds light on its way of linking events.

Shi ji goes much further regarding the establishment of causality with remarkable complexity, because of its considerably larger scale of narratives and their widely interrelated distribution of narratives. The *Shi ji*, which largely consists of coherent narratives, narrates varied subjects, ranging from an individual, a family, a state, to an empire from its rise until its demise, encouraging readers to consider the reasons behind these historical changes.

3.2 Orders in the *Zuo zhuan*

Before the *Shi ji*, *Zuo zhuan* had already used diverse temporal orders in its narration, including prolepses, in the form of divination, dreams, predictions, and analepses, many of which begin with *chu* 初 (“sometime earlier” or “at the beginning”). This preliminary attempt to connect events in order to set up their logical relations is a big step from the *Chun qiu*. Readers of the *Zuo zhuan* may find that its characters are didactic as well as superstitious, that its didactic effects are very strong. But why and how? This section aims to answer these questions by examining the structure of the narratives.

Narratives in *Zuo zhuan* have three features: first, most narratives are considerably shorter than those in the *Shi ji*; second, the wide distribution of narratives that present the same state, individual, or event obscures any relations among episodes,

either logical or subject's correlations; third, one-to-one correspondences between cause and effect, such as divinations and predictions that lead to certain consequences, are its major model of causality. The first and second feature may result from the traditional premise that the *Zuo zhuan* is a commentary on *Chun qiu*, and therefore narratives are organized in parallel with the entries of *Chun qiu*, which are sequenced chronologically, according to the chronological order of the Lu calendar in the current form of *Zuo zhuan*. The second feature may partly explains why some scholars have attempted to thread the interrelated but scattered narratives into a necklace of events; this style of historical work is called *benmo ti* 本末體 (literarily means a genre that examines the roots and branches of the recorded events).²³⁵ These three features severely limit the complexity of narratives in the *Zuo zhuan*. My comparison of the scenes that appear both in the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji* shows that *Zuo zhuan* presents a simpler version of the causality of the past.

Prolepses in the *Zuo zhuan* involve a great diversity of subjects, including divinations on warfare, sacrifices, journeys, gatherings, covenants, marriages, births, conferment of ranks and titles, assignment of roles and offices, the choice of site for the capital, to name only a few. The example below is a prediction by a ghost on warfare.

In the 11th year of Lord Xi of Lu's reign, Hutu 狐突 meets the ghost of former Heir-apparent, Shensheng 申生, also known by his posthumous title Gong 恭 (共).

²³⁵ Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1644-1703), *Zuozhuan jishi benmo* 左傳紀事本末. 3 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979.

Shensheng was the son of Lord Xian of Jin and his primary wife was Lady Jiang of Qi. Lord Xian later married another woman from the Quanrong 犬戎, who was known as Lady Li 驪姬 and gave birth to a son called Xiqi 奚齊. During the competition for succession between Shensheng and his half-brother Xiqi, Shensheng ultimately chose to commit suicide out of respect for his father's attachment to Lady Li. The excerpt below is a conversation between Shensheng and Hutu. The ghost of Shensheng is about to ask the High Lord to punish Jin because of the mistake made by Yiwu. Hutu disagrees with the ghost and provides his rational reasons. The ghost therefore reconsiders this problem and announces a new punishment, which is also a prediction that Jin will be defeated at Han (also known as Hanyuan). It reads:

晉侯改葬共大（太）子，秋，狐突適下國，遇大子，大子使登僕，而告之曰，夷吾無禮，余得請於帝矣，將以晉畀秦，秦將祀余，對曰，臣聞之，神不歆非類，民不祀非族，君祀無乃殄乎，且民何罪，失刑乏祀，君其圖之，君曰，諾，吾將復請，七日，新城西偏，將有巫者而見我焉，許之，遂不見，及期而往，告之曰，帝許我罰有罪矣，敝於韓。²³⁶

Lord Jin moved the tomb of Crown Prince Gong. In the autumn, Hutu went to the [lower capital] and encountered [the ghost of] the [former] Crown Prince. The Crown Prince asked him to climb [into the chariot] and drive it, telling him, “Yiwu did not act in accordance with ritual. I have asked the High Lord to give Jin to Qin, and Qin will sacrifice to me.”

[Hutu] responded, “Your subject has heard that the spirits do not accept sacrifices from those who are not of their own kind, and people do not offer sacrifices to those who are not of their own clan. [If Jin is given to Qin,] would sacrifices to you not come to an end? Moreover, what fault have the people

²³⁶ ZZ, Xi 10.3, 334-35.

committed? To punish [the innocent] and have your sacrifices abrogated—Lord, you may need to think about his.”

The lord said, “All right. I will make a second request. On the seventh day, in the west side of the New City, there will be a wizard, through whom you will meet me.” [Hu Tu] agreed and thereafter [the prince] disappeared. When the time came, [Hu Tu] went to [the meeting]. [The wizard] told him “The Emperor [of Heaven] allowed me to punish the person who committed this crime. He will be defeated at Han.”

This narrative reads like a part of a large narrative whose beginning and ending have been cut off. Since it does not explain what “Yiwu did not act in accordance with ritual” 夷吾無禮 refers to, we readers have no clue about the reason why Jin is to be defeated at Han.²³⁷ Although it ends with the brief prediction that Jin will be defeated at Han, no additional information is provided, such as what will happen at Han and whether this prediction is fulfilled. Indeed, if readers keep reading by following the chorological order in which the *Zuo zhuan* was arranged, they would find Jin and Qin confronted each other in a battle at Han five years after this conversation, in the entry under Lord Xi’s 15th year. Jin was defeated and Yiwu, Lord Hui of Jin 晉惠公 (r. 650-637 B.C.E.), was captured by Lord Mu of Qin.²³⁸ Although the significance of the ghost’s prediction becomes clear, the coherence is broken because these two narratives are placed in different locations in *Zuo zhuan*.

²³⁷ According to the *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, the phrase “夷吾無禮” is not clear. But it might refer to the fact that Lord Hui (Yiwu) married his widowed sister-in-law, the wife of Shensheng. See ZZ Xi 10.3, 334. He also suggests connecting with entry 15.4 in Xi 15, 351.

²³⁸ See ZZ Xi 15.4, 356.

Unlike *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji* presents a coherent version and a bigger picture of the situation of the battle. Its coherency is achieved by having the related episodes in one organized chapter and by adding a short ditty at the end, offering more and specific information on the fate of Jin and providing the readers with clues as to what would happen next and where to expect it.²³⁹ More importantly, if we look at the bigger picture of the state of Jin, we note that the *Shi ji* version of this conversation between the ghost and Hutu is placed in the middle of the chapter of “Hereditary House of Jin,” as one episode in the entire course of Jin from its rise to decline.

Moreover, *Zuo zhuan* often sets up causality through temporal order. In many cases, the cause is a prediction or divination based on moral considerations. *Chu*, when it means “sometime earlier,” is one of the indicators of analepsis in early Chinese historical writing. The second narrative introduced by *chu* is always the direct or the only reason for a certain result, because of the relatively small scales of most narratives in *Zuo zhuan*. In the example below, *chu* is used as signal of analepsis, evoking a divination concerning a marriage that happened earlier, performed by the wife of Yi about marrying their daughter to Chen Wan. It is appended by another divination, which was done by a historian of Zhou even earlier, when Chen Wan was little, in his own state of Chen. Then

²³⁹ 兒乃謠曰：「恭太子更葬矣，後十四年，晉亦不昌，昌乃在兄。」Children therefore sang the ditty, saying “The heir-apparent was reburied. In fourteen years, Jin will not prosper. The prosperity [of Jin] will be [in the reign of the elder brother [of Yiwu].”

the narrative goes back to the first narrative using the term *ji* 及 (“when it came to the time that ...”), and verifies the two previous divinations.

二十二年，春，陳人殺其大子御寇，陳公子完與顓孫奔齊……飲桓公酒，樂，公曰，以火繼之，辭曰，臣卜其晝，未卜其夜，不敢，君子曰，酒以成禮，不繼以淫，義也，以君成禮，弗納於淫，仁也。²⁴⁰

In the 22nd year [of Lord Zhuang of Lu], spring, the people of Chen killed their Crown Prince Yukou, the son of the Lord of Chen, [Tian] Wan, and Zhuansun fled to Qi...[One day], Chen Wan invited Lord Huan to drink. [Lord Huan] was enjoying himself. He said, “Let us continue with lights.”

[Chen Wan] declined, saying: “I divined about [drinking] during the day but did not divine about the night. I dare not [to do it]. The noble man says, ‘Drinking is to complete the ritual. It is righteousness not to continue excessively. To complete the ritual with the lord but not to allow him to fall into excess—this is humanity.’”

初，懿氏卜妻敬仲，其妻占之曰吉，是謂鳳皇于飛，和鳴鏘鏘，有媯之後，將育于姜，五世其昌，並于正卿，八世之後，莫之與京，陳厲公，蔡出也，故蔡人殺五父而立之，生敬仲，其少也，周史有以周易見陳侯者，陳侯使筮之，遇觀之否，曰，是謂觀國之光，利用賓于王，此其代陳有國乎，不在此，其在異國，非此其身，在其子孫，光遠而自他有耀者也，坤，土也，巽，風也，乾，天也，風為天於土上，山也，有山之材，而照之以天光，於是乎居土上，故曰，觀國之光，利用賓于王，庭實旅百，奉之以玉帛，天地之美具焉，故曰，利用賓于王，猶有觀焉，故曰，其在後乎，風行而著於土，故曰其在異國乎，若在異國，必姜姓也，姜，大嶽之後也，山嶽則配天，物莫能兩大，陳衰，此其昌乎。²⁴¹

Sometime earlier, a man from the clan of Yi divined by turtle-shell about marrying [his daughter] to Jingzhong [Chen Wan]. [Yi's] wife consulted the prognostications, saying they were auspicious. It said: “The male and female phoenixes soar in flight. One responds to the other harmoniously. The descendant of Wei will be raised among the Jiang. In five generations, they will flourish and

²⁴⁰ ZZ Zhuang 22.1, 220.

²⁴¹ ZZ, Zhuang 22.1, 221-24.

stand along the chief ministers. In eight generations, none will be able to compete with them.”

Lord Li of Chen was born of a lady from Cai. Therefore, the people of Cai killed Wufu and installed Lord Li. [He] sired Jingzhong. When Jingzhong was little, a historian from Zhou was able to meet Marquis of Chen because of his knowledge of the *Changes* of Zhou. The Marquis of Chen had him divine the birth of Jingzhong by milfoil. [The historian] encountered the hexagram of “Viewing” and the line whereby it becomes the hexagram “Obstruction,”²⁴² and said: “this means ‘Of this we say, ‘One views the light of the state, benefits will be taken by the King. This boy will inherit a state on behalf of Chen! It is not here but in a different state. It is not he himself, but his descendant. The light is from far away and its brightness comes from a different source. ‘Pure Yin (*kun*)’ is the earth; ‘Gentle (*xun*)’ the wind; and ‘Pure Yang’ (*qian*) is heaven. Wind as heaven above earth means mountain; possessing the resources of a mountain and illuminating it with the light of heaven, in this way, he will dwell above the earth. Hence, it is said, ‘It is profitable to be a guest of a king.’ In the King’s courtyard, goods are displayed by the hundreds. Jades and silks are presented to him. All the beautiful things from heaven and earth are here. Therefore, it says, ‘It is profitable to be the guest of a king, [but] still there is the *viewing* hexagram. Thus, the profit might be with his descendants!’ The wind moves and strikes upon the earth. That is why it says ‘[This] might be in a different state!’ If it is in different state, [the state] must be [ruled] by the Jiang surname. The Jiangs are descendants of Grand Peaks. Mountain peaks are mates of heaven. Among things, there cannot be two of equal greatness. As Chen declines, his line will prosper!’”

及陳之初亡也，陳桓子始大於齊，其後亡也，成子得政。²⁴³

When the state Chen was destroyed by Chu for the first time, Viscount Huan of Chen began to be powerful in Qi. When [Chen] was later destroyed again, Viscount Cheng of Chen (Tian) had obtained the control of [Qi’s] government.

²⁴² The hexagrams “Viewing” and “Obstruction” is very similar exception for the fourth line. The divination was made by burning a piece of turtle-shell. The hexagram “Obstruction” is obtained if the fourth line from the bottom of the “Viewing” hexagram is unbroken instead of broken. The diviner first got the “Viewing” hexagram, but later the broken line became one line. Therefore, “Obstruction” hexagram was obtained.

²⁴³ ZZ, Zhuang 22.1, 234.

In this example, the protagonist Chen Wan fled from his own state and was already in the state of Qi in the first scene with the Lord Huang of Qi. Then, the secondary narrative about an earlier divination regarding the future of Chen Wan and his descendants started with *chu*. It predicted that Chen Wan's descendants would be powerful in the state of Qi. When the narration of divination is completed, the primary narrative resumes by beginning with *ji*. It is a fulfillment of the divination: when Chen Wan's native state first started to decline, Chen Wan's fifth generation descendant, Viscount Huan of Chen (Huanzi) became powerful; later, when the state of Chen perished in the end, the eighth generation, Viscount Cheng of Chen (Chengzi) took over the power.

From Chen Wan's speech conformed to Chengzi's seizure of power in Qi, the presence of the second narrative causes the first narrative to be taken as the only reason to account for the Tian family's ascent in Qi, implying a direct one-on-one causal relationship between them, and ruling out other possible factors, which are offered in detail in the *Shi ji*. The causality from the divination to its fulfillment may result partly resulted from the small scale of the narrative unit in the *Zuo zhuan*. But more importantly, the two conjoined narratives are actually the contents and the interpretations of these divinations. When the inserted narrative switches back to the primary narrative, two prominent figures from the Chen lineage in Qi, Huanzi and Chengzi, are brought in to briefly verify the two divinations. It does not mention any other possible factors which

may account for the rise of the Chen lineage, although in other separate entries there are some didactic speeches by Wenzi, suggesting that his compliance with *li* may have been a cause as well.

These two divinations and the rise of Chen lineage in Qi are also depicted in the *Shi ji*. In contrast to *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji* restores the chronological order by arranging these divinations at the beginning of the chapter and painstakingly describes the attempts of the Chen members to obtain power in Qi. I shall dwell on the differences between *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji* regarding this issue in Chapter 4.²⁴⁴

As shown in the above example, *chu* was frequently used in narratives in the *Zuo zhuan*, indicating that the narrative is depicting an event or incident that happened in the past. However, it is not necessarily a marker of analepsis. According to its location in a narrative, *chu* has two usages with different meanings: if it appears at the beginning, it means “at the beginning” or “in the past,” which have a similar functions as the conventional phrase “long long ago” to establish the setting of a story; if it appears in the middle of narration, it means, “sometime earlier in the past” and evokes a precedent of the current episode that the reader needs to know. Occasionally, prior to *chu*, we find a line that is copied from the corresponding section of *Chun qiu*. The narrative right after this line is supposed to explain it; however, it has nothing to do with the plot of this

²⁴⁴ See 4.2.2.1 *How* vs. *What*: Example of the Tian clan in Qi, 217.

narrative. Thus, not every *chu* is a signal of an analepsis; in contrast, the first usage is a way to connect the action to an earlier event, and sometimes it can be a prolepsis.

In the example below, the narrative starts with *chu* and has nothing to do with the previous sentence regarding the action of Lord Huan of Lu, who participated in an alien sacrifice ceremony to his ancestor at the ancestor temple. Two other temporal markers, the 24th year and the 30th year of Lord Hui of Jin, indicate the chronological order of the narrative. It is about Lord Mu of Jin's naming of his two sons, Crown Prince Chou and a son by a concubine, called Chengshi, who is also called as Huanshu 桓叔 a few lines below in the excerpt.²⁴⁵ This entry reads:

冬，公至自唐，告于廟也。凡公行，告于宗廟，反行飲至，舍爵策勳焉，禮也。特相會，往來稱地，讓事也，自參以上，則往稱地，來稱會，成事也。

In winter, the duke arrived from Tang. [This was] to inform [the spirits of ancestors] at the ancestral temple. Whenever the duke went [out of the state], [he] announced [it] in the ancestral temple. When he came back, he had the ritual of drinking. When he put down the cup, he had a transaction entered in the tablets; - this was the ritual. When only two parties were concerned at a meeting, the place of it was mentioned in both parties' accounts of setting out of the return, as if to signify how each had declined to take the presidency. When three or more parties were concerned, then the place was mentioned in the account of the going, and on the return it was said, "The duke came from the meeting," intimating that there was a president, and that the business was completed.

初，晉穆侯之夫人姜氏，以條之役生太子，命之曰仇，其弟以千畝之戰生，命之曰成師。師服曰，異哉君之名子也，夫名以制義，義以出禮，禮以體政，政以正民，是以政成而民聽，易則生亂，嘉耦曰妃，怨耦曰仇，古之命也，今君命大子曰仇，弟曰成師，始兆亂矣，兄其替乎。

²⁴⁵ Chengshi was also known as 曲沃桓叔 (802-731 B.C.E.), since Huan 桓 was his posthumous title and his enfeoffment was in Quwo.

Sometime earlier, the primary wife of Lord Mu of Jin gave birth to the Crown Prince at the time of the battle at Tiao. [The lord] named him Chou [enemy]. His younger brother was born at the time of the battle at Qianmu. [The lord] named him Chengshi [completed armies]. Shi Fu said, “The naming of the lord is so strange! Names should regulate meanings; meanings are to express rituals; rituals are to embody governing; governing is to rectify people. Therefore, when the government is brought to fruition, the people obey; when the course is changed, it produces disorder. A good spouse is called *Fei* [consort]; a resentful spouse is called *Chou* [enemy]. These are ancient naming practices. Now the lord named the Crown Prince Chou and [his] younger brother Chengshi. [It] initiated omens of disorder. Will the older brother be replaced?

惠之二十四年，晉始亂，故封桓叔于曲沃，靖侯之孫欒賓傅之，師服曰，吾聞國家之立也，本大而末小，是以能固，故天子建國，諸侯立家，卿置側室，大夫有貳宗，士有隸子弟，庶人工商，各有分親，皆有等衰，是以民服事其上，而下無覬覦，今晉，甸侯也，而建國，本既弱矣，其能久乎？

In the 24th year of Lord Hui, Jin’s disorder commenced. [The lord] enfeoffed Huanshu in Quwo and the grandson of Marquis of Jing, Luan Bin, assisted him.” Shi Fu said, “I have heard that in the establishment of a state and a house, when the root is large while the branches are small, it thereby be secured. Therefore, the son of Heaven establishes states; the lords establish collateral families; high officials set up their secondary branches; officers set up sub-families, the lowest nobles have their sons and younger brothers in administration; and commoners have craftsmen and merchants, who have relatives of various degrees of closeness. They all have hierarchies. Therefore, people serve their superiors, and inferiors do not glance greedily. Now Jin is [just] a marquis in the region of Dian but has established a state. When the root is weakened, how can it last long?

惠之三十年，晉潘父弑昭侯而立桓叔，不克，晉人立孝侯。惠之四十五年，曲沃莊伯伐翼，弑孝侯，翼人立其弟鄂侯，鄂侯生哀侯，哀侯侵陘庭之田，陘庭南鄙，啟曲沃伐翼。²⁴⁶

In the 30th year of Lord Hui, Fanfu of Jin killed the Marquis of Zhao and [intended] to enthrone Huanshu. [Jin] was not vanquished and people of Jin installed Marquis of Xiao. In the 45th year of Lord Hui, Zhuang, the Earl of Quwo

²⁴⁶ ZZ, Huan 2.7, 2.8, 91-96.

attacked Yi and murdered the Marquis of Xiao. The People of Yi installed his younger brother, Marquis of E. Marquis of E sired the Marquis of Ai. The Marquis of Ai overran the fields at Jingting, which were on his southern border, and so opened the attack by Quwo on Yi.”

The Jin statesman Shifu predicts that the improper names bestowed by the lord is a signal of chaos to come in Jin. In the 24th year of Lord Hui of Lu, Shifu interpreted that the chaos started with the enfeoffment of Chengshi, with his even worse prediction that Jin would not survive long. Following this prediction are two facts as evidence of the chaos: one is that Lord Zhao of Jin was killed in the 30th year of Lord Hui of Lu; and that after another fifteen years, a battle between Jin and Yi was provoked. Therefore, *chu* in this case is not a signal of analepsis; rather, it is a marker informing the readers that this is the beginning of a narrative that happened in the past. The entire narrative is about the prediction of wrongful naming, from its taking place, its partial verification by with observation and interpretation, to its full verification at the end.

The two examples above show that *chu* is a versatile word which can connect the current episode with earlier one(s), either at the beginning, to follow a chronological order, or in the middle of the first narrative as an analepsis. On the other hand, the different ways of using *chu*, although both for the sake of introducing earlier events, produce different effects. Using *chu* at the beginning and letting the narrative follow a chronological order turns the entire narrative into a report of the divination, consisting of the context of the divination, the reading of the divination, and the stages of verification.

The focus of the narrative is switched from the event to interpreting and verifying the divinations, and other forms of prolepsis, such as omens and dreams.

3.3 Narrative Orders in the *Shi ji*

3.3.1 Chronological Order

In *Shi ji*, many chapters consist of narratives following a chronological order. In other words, the narrative order is as the same as the story order. But more than that, the first event and the subsequent one are interlocked as the latter not only happens later but also depends on the completion of the former. There are no specific words to signal the relationship between the two episodes because readers can just follow by common sense. Of course, this is not to say that the later event is caused by the earlier one exclusively. Instead, many consequences of events are indirectly determined by other possible factors. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is remarkably common for several causes to lead to one consequence (though one cause may be the proximate or the most important). Meanwhile, one cause may bring about a series of consequences. This is one of the reasons why readers can come to different propositions even if they have read the same narratives. My point here is that this is one way among others in the *Shi ji* in order to establish a complicated causal relationship.

The description of Empress Dowager Lü's is one example among many others.

呂太后者，高祖微時妃也，生孝惠帝、女魯元太后。及高祖為漢王，得定陶戚姬，愛幸，生趙隱王如意。孝惠為人仁弱，高祖以為不類我，常欲廢太子，立戚姬子如意，如意類我。戚姬幸，常從上之關東，日夜啼泣，欲立其子代太子。呂后年長，常留守，希見上，益疏。如意立為趙王後，幾代太子者數矣，賴大臣爭之，及留侯策，太子得毋廢。²⁴⁷

Empress Dowager Lü was the consort of Gaozu when he was still a commoner. [She] gave birth to Emperor Xiaohui and a daughter, Empress Dowager Yuan of Lu. When Gaozu became King of Han, he obtained Lady Qi from Dingtao and loved her dearly. [Lady Qi] bore Ruyi, King Yin of Zhao. [Since] Emperor Xiaohui's personality was humane and weak, Gaozu believed that [Xiaohui] was not like him and frequently wanted to dismiss his Crown Prince and install the son of Lady Qi, Ruyi [because] Ruyi shared similarities with him. Lady Qi was favored and often followed Gaozu to go east of [Hangu] Pass. [She] wept day and night and wanted have her son replace the Crown Prince. Empress Lü was older and often stayed behind. [Since she] rarely met with Gaozu, [they] became more and more estranged. After Ruyi became the Prince of Zhao, he almost replaced the Crown Prince several times. Because of the arguments of ministers and the strategy of Marquis of Liu, the Crown Prince was not dismissed.

呂后為人剛毅，佐高祖定天下，所誅大臣多呂后力。呂后兄二人，皆為將。長兄周呂侯死事，封其子呂臺為酈侯，子產為交侯；次兄呂釋之為建成侯。²⁴⁸

Empress Lü's personality was tough and resolute. [She] assisted Emperor Gaozu in stabilizing all under the heaven. The executions of ministers resulted mostly from the power of Empress Lü. Two elder brothers of Empress Lü were both generals. The eldest brother, Marquis of Zhoulü, died in service [to the state]. [Emperor Gaozu] enfeoffed his son, Lü Tai as the Marquis of Li and his son Lü Chan as the Marquis of Jiao. Her second-eldest brother, Lü Shizhi, was the Marquis of Jiancheng.

高祖十二年四月甲辰，崩長樂宮，太子襲號為帝。是時高祖八子：長男肥，孝惠兄也，異母，肥為齊王；餘皆孝惠弟，戚姬子如意為趙王……²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ *SJ* 9. 395-96.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 396.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

On the day of *Jiachen* in the twelfth year of Gaozu's reign, [he] passed away in the Palace of Lasting Joy and the heir-apparent succeeded the title to be the emperor. At this time, Gaozu had eight sons: The oldest, Liu Fei, was the older brother of Emperor Xiaohui, by a different mother. Fei was the Prince of Qi; all the rest were younger brothers of Emperor Xiaohui. Ruyi, the son of Lady Qi, was Prince of Zhao...

呂后最怨戚夫人及其子趙王，乃令永巷囚戚夫人，而召趙王。使者三反，趙相建平侯周昌謂使者曰：「高帝屬臣趙王，趙王年少。竊聞太后怨戚夫人，欲召趙王并誅之，臣不敢遣王。王且亦病，不能奉詔。」

Empress Lü most hated Lady Qi and his son, the Prince of Zhao. [She], therefore [on the one hand], commanded [the officials] of the Long Halls to imprison Lady Qi and summoned the Prince of Zhao [to court]. The envoys returned several times. The prime minister with title of Marquis of Jianping, Zhou Chang, told the envoy that "Emperor Gaozu entrusted me with the mission of [watching over] the Prince of Zhao. The Prince of Zhao was young. I have heard that the Empress Dowager hates Lady Qi and intended to summon the Prince of Zhao in order to kill him. I do not dare send the prince [to his death]. Moreover, the prince is still ill and cannot obey the summons. "

呂后大怒，乃使人召趙相。趙相徵至長安，乃使人復召趙王。王來，未到。孝惠帝慈仁，知太后怒，自迎趙王霸上，與入宮，自挾與趙王起居飲食。太后欲殺之，不得閒。孝惠元年十二月，帝晨出射。趙王少，不能蚤起。太后聞其獨居，使人持酖飲之。犁明，孝惠還，趙王已死。於是乃徙淮陽王友為趙王。夏，詔賜酈侯父追謚為令武侯。²⁵⁰

Empress Lü was furious and sent an envoy to summon the prime minister. [After] the prime minister obeyed and arrived in Chang'an, [Empress Lü] then dispatched someone to summon the Prince of Zhao again. The prince set out but had not yet arrived in [the capital]. Emperor Xiaohui was humane and knew that Empress Dowager Lü was enraged. [Therefore,] he went to Bashang to meet the Prince of Zhao in person, entered the palace with him, and kept the Prince of Zhao by his side, eating and sleeping with him. Empress Lü wished to kill him, [but] she could not find an opportunity. In the first year of Emperor Xiaohui's reign, in the twelfth month, the emperor went out hunting in the morning. The Prince of Zhao was very young and could not get up so early. When Empress Lü heard that he

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 397.

was staying alone, she sent someone to bear poison and had the king drink it. When it was nearly dawn, Emperor Xiaohui returned and the Prince of Zhao was already dead. After this, [Empress Lü] appointed You, the Prince of Huaiyang, as the Prince of Zhao. In the summer, [Empress Lü] issued an edict awarding the posthumous title of Lingwu to the father of Marquis of Li.

太后遂斷戚夫人手足，去眼，燬耳，飲瘖藥，使居廁中，命曰「人彘」。

Empress Lü, thereupon, cut off Lady Qi's hands and feet, removed her eyes, burned her ears, had her drink a type of decoction to [make her dumb], made her live in a privy, and named her "human pig."²⁵¹

居數日，乃召孝惠帝觀人彘。孝惠見，問，乃知其戚夫人，乃大哭，因病，歲餘不能起。使人請太后曰：「此非人所為。臣為太后子，終不能治天下。」孝惠以此日飲為淫樂，不聽政，故有病也。²⁵²

After several days, [Empress Lü] summoned Emperor Xiaohui to take a look at the human pig. Emperor Xiaohui saw her, injured, and only then knew that it was Lady Qi. [He] therefore cried loudly, became ill, and could not get up for over a year. [He] sent someone to tell Empress Dowager: "This is not what humans do. [Since] I am your son, Empress Dowager, I would not be able to rule all under the heaven." Emperor Xiaohui drank every day and indulged in music, he did not attend to the state affairs. Therefore, [he] became ill.

In order to analyze the relationship among these events, I divide them into seven episodes and summarize their contents below.

Episode 1: The son of Empress Dowager Lü won the contest over the position of Crown Prince. Because of the threat presented by of Lady Qi's son, conflicts between Empress Dowager Lü and Lady Qi became acute.

Episode 2: Empress Dowager Lü schemed to kill great ministers.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

Episode 3: Emperor Gaozu died and Lü's son ascended the throne.

Episode 4: Lü's scheme to summon Lady Qi's son to the capital and killing him failed.

Episode 5: She summoned Lady Qi's son again and had him killed by poison.

Episode 6: Lady Qi was made a human pig (*renzhi* 人彘)

Episode 7: Emperor Xiaohui became sick and indulged in drinking and music.

Each episode in this chain moves forward upon the completion of the previous one. In the above example, Episode 2 is not an exclusive premise of Episode 3.

Associated with Episode 1, Episode 2, which is a short embedded summary conveying Lü's personality, explains why Emperor Xiaohui can ascend the throne. Both episodes pave the way for Lü's subsequent ruthless treatment to Lady Qi. Meanwhile, Episode 1 directly leads to Episode 4. Although there are two inserted episodes between them, the fact that Lü hates Lady Qi and his son (The Prince of Zhao) most is a result of the described in Episode 1.

3.3.2 Order of Simultaneous Events

Sima Qian used many simultaneous descriptions in his writing, when it comes to the military operations involving several parties. This explains why the narrative order of historical writings is never as the same as story order. In contrast with the aforementioned Hongmen Banquet scene, in order to represent the tensions and actions of each party

clearly, Sima used some conjunctions and adverbial expressions, such as *shishi* 是時 and *dangshishi* 當此時, both meanings “at this time” signaling that these events happened simultaneously. We will see more examples later in this chapter, where I argue that the chronological order indicates interlocking of causality.

During the Qin-Han transition, the Battle of Chenggao 成皋之戰 had a significant consequences for the competition between Liu and Xiang, two generals who had the potential to substantially control the overall empire left over by the Qin. A section of the narrative in the “Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” primarily involves four powerful parties among many others at that time: Xiang Yu, Liu Bang, Han Xin 韓信 (230-196 B.C.E.) and one of the lords called Peng Yue 彭越 (?-196 B.C.E.). It happened in the fourth year in the reign of King Han (204 B.C.E.). One year before this battle, Liu was defeated by Xiang in the battle at Xingyang 滎陽. Liu therefore assembled his army and entered Chenggao in order to defend against Xiang. Thereafter, Xiang encircled Chenggao. The three paragraphs below describe their simultaneous movements over a couple of months.²⁵³

漢之四年，項王進兵圍成皋。漢王逃，獨與滕公出成皋北門，渡河走修武，從張耳、韓信軍。諸將稍稍得出成皋，從漢王。楚遂拔成皋，欲西。漢使兵距之鞏，令其不得西。

²⁵³ It should be two to three months according to the “Table by Months of the Times of Qin and Chu” 秦楚之際月表, “七月，立布為淮南王。九月，太公，呂后歸自楚。” In the seventh month, [Liu Bang] ascended Jing Bu as the King of Huainan. In the ninth month, the old man [Liu Bang’s father] and Empress Lü returned from Chu. See *SJ* 17. 795.

In the fourth year of Han (203 B.C.E.), King Xiang advanced his army to surround Chenggao. The King of Han escaped. He went out through the north gate of Chenggao alone with Lord Teng. [They] crossed the Yellow River to flee to Xiuwu, and joined the armies of Zhang Er and Han Xin. [The King of Han's] generals were gradually able to get out of Chenggao and follow the King of Han. The Chu²⁵⁴ therefore captured Chenggao and wished to move westward. Han sent troops to resist at Gong and prevented Chu from going westward.

是時，彭越渡河擊楚東阿，殺楚將軍薛公。項王乃自東擊彭越。漢王得淮陰侯兵，欲渡河南。鄭忠說漢王，乃止壁河內。使劉賈將兵佐彭越，燒楚積聚。項王東擊破之，走彭越。漢王則引兵渡河，復取成皋，軍廣武，就敖倉食。項王已定東海來，西，與漢俱臨廣武而軍，相守數月。

At the same time, Peng Yue crossed the Yellow River to attack Chu's army at Dong'e. [He] killed the Chu general, Lord Xue. King Xiang, thus, marched the east in person to attack Peng Yue. The King of Han obtained the army of the Marquis of Huaiyin and wished to cross the Yellow River to be on the south [bank]. Zheng Zhong persuaded the King of Han [not to do so], the King of Han then stopped and built a walled camp at Henei.²⁵⁵ [He] sent Liu Jia to lead an army to assist Peng Yue and burn Chu's stores and provisions. King Xiang attacked to the east, defeated them, and put Peng Yue to flight. The King of Han then led his troops across the Yellow River, retook Chenggao, and camped at Guangwu to be closer to the provisions at Ao Granary. King Xiang came after he pacified the eastern seaboard, proceeded west, and camped at Guangwu with Han. [They] both defended for several months.

當此時，彭越數反梁地，絕楚糧食，項王患之。為高俎，置太公其上，告漢王曰：「今不急下，吾烹太公。」漢王曰：「吾與項羽俱北面受命懷王，曰『約為兄弟』，吾翁即若翁，必欲烹而翁，則幸分我一壺羹。」項王怒，欲殺之。項伯曰：「天下事未可知，且為天下者不顧家，雖殺之無益，只益禍耳。」項王從之。²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Chu refers to Xiang Yu.

²⁵⁵ Henei refers to the County of Heinei, in modern Henan province.

²⁵⁶ *SJ* 7. 327-28.

Meanwhile, Peng Yue returned several times to the region of Liang and cut off the supply line. King Xiang was anxious about it. [He] constructed a high sacrificial altar, placing Liu Bang's father on it, and announced to the King of Han, "If you do not surrender to me at once, I shall boil your father alive!"

The King of Han said, "Xiang Yu and I both received orders from King Huai by facing the north and saying 'We swear to be brothers.' My father is your father. If you insist on boiling your father alive, I hope you will be good enough to share me a cup of the soup."

King Xiang was furious and was about to kill the old man. Lord Xiang said, "The affairs of the world have yet to be known. Furthermore, a man, one who works to rule the world, does not care about a member of his family. Even if [you] kill him, you will not benefit from it, but will only increase your misfortunes." King Xiang followed his advice.

We do not know whether or how Sima Qian divided this passage, but I break it into three sections for the sake of clarity. It is not easy to sketch the complicated and simultaneous military movements because of the constantly changing circumstances involving several powers. Each describes one power and its interactions with Xiang and sometimes others, explaining the reasons for their movements step by step. Here the narrative order is different from the story order, as the narrator cannot introduce the moves of all the parties at the same time, although they did happen simultaneously.

The first paragraph begins with a date, mainly dealing with the fights between Liu and Xiang. It briefly generalizes the process and the consequences of the first stage of the Battle of Chenggao, which sets up the bigger picture of several powers involved in the second stage: Chu conquered Chenggao and planned to head west, whereas Han defended against Chu at Gong. The second and third paragraphs, starting with *shishi* 是時 and *dangshishi* 當是時 respectively, indicate that they are about the operations of other

powers taking place at the same time. The first half of the second paragraph addresses the battle between Xiang and Peng, which resulted in the recapture of Chenggao. In other words, Liu took advantage of the fighting between Peng and Xiang to recaptured Chenggao. At the end of the second stage, Chu and Han fought to a stalemate at Guangwu. The third paragraph describes Xiang's response to Peng's disruption of Chu's food supply: Xiang was anxious and therefore hoped to use Liu's father to coerce Liu to head west. With all these actions taking place at the same time, the text describes the highly complicated, fierce and simultaneous tensions from different perspectives.

Another good example is the attempt on the life of King of Qin, Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259-210 B.C.E.) who later unified all the states and titled himself *shi huangdi* 始皇帝, the First Emperor. The swordsman, Jing Ke 荊軻 (?-227 B.C.E.), and his thirteen-year-old assistant, Qin Wuyang 秦舞陽, went to Qin at the request of Crown Prince Dan of Yan 燕太子丹 (?-226 B.C.E.). Unlike the previous example, this scene happened in an enclosed space, the Xianyang Palace. Jing Ke and Qin Wuyang claimed that they were bringing the map of Yan and the head of a Qin traitor to the First Emperor, but in fact they were looking for the opportunity to stand close enough to the King of Qin to kill him. Sima uses 428 Chinese characters to depict the scene from the moment when Jing and Wu stepped into the hall to the fight between Jing and the king, and finally Jing's death. It reads:

荊軻奉樊於期頭函，而秦舞陽奉地圖柙，以次進。至陞，秦舞陽色變振恐，群臣怪之。荊軻顧笑舞陽，前謝曰：「北蕃蠻夷之鄙人，未嘗見天子，故振懼。願大王少假借之，使得畢使於前。」秦王謂軻曰：「取舞陽所持地圖。」軻既取圖奏之，秦王發圖，圖窮而匕首見。因左手把秦王之袖，而右手持匕首揜之。未至身，秦王驚，自引而起，袖絕。拔劍，劍長，操其室。時惶急，劍堅，故不可立拔。荊軻逐秦王，秦王環柱而走。²⁵⁷

Jing Ke bore the box containing the head of Fan Yuqi and Qin Wuyang carried the case of the map [of Yan]. [They] entered [the throne room] one after another. When they reached the steps of the throne, Qin Wuyang turned pale and began to tremble with fright. Various ministers thought this strange. Jing Ke looked back and laughed at Qin Wuyang, then stepped forward to apologize: "This man is a simple rustic from the barbarous region of the northern border; he has never seen the Son of Heaven. Therefore, he shakes with fright. I beg Your Majesty to pardon him for the moment and permit [me] to complete my mission before you."

The King of Qin said to Jing Ke, "Bring the map that Wuyang is carrying." Ke took the map [from the case] and presented it [to the king]. The king of Qin opened the map. When he came to the end of the map, a dagger appeared. Taking advantage of that moment, [Jing Ke] seized the king's sleeve with his left hand while he held the dagger to stab the king. Before the dagger reached his body, the king was alarmed and leapt from his seat; even his sleeve was torn. [The king] tried to draw his sword, but it was long and clung to the scabbard. At that time, [the king] was scared and in crisis. Since the sword was hard, he could not get it out immediately. Jing Ke pursued the King of Qin and King of Qin ran around a pillar.

群臣皆愕，卒起不意，盡失其度。而秦法，群臣侍殿上者不得持尺寸之兵；諸郎中執兵皆陳殿下，非有詔召不得上。方急時，不及召下兵，以故荊軻乃逐秦王。而卒惶急，無以擊軻，而以手共搏之。²⁵⁸

All the ministers were astonished. Since it happened unexpectedly, they all failed to consider the problem. But according to the law of Qin, all the ministers serving in the throne room were not allowed to bring a weapon of any size. Various palace guards stood at the bottom of the hall. They were not permitted to ascend to the hall unless they had a command from the king. Since [the king] was in a

²⁵⁷ *SJ* 86. 2534-35.

²⁵⁸ *SJ* 86. 2535.

crisis, he did not have the time to summon the soldiers from the bottom. For this reason, Jing Ke was able to pursue him. [The king] was in a panic and rushed about. [Since] he had nothing to attack Ke with, he clenched his hands together to flail at Ke.

是時侍醫夏無且以其所奉藥囊提荊軻也。秦王方環柱走，卒惶急，不知所為，左右乃曰：「王負劍！」負劍，遂拔以擊荊軻，斷其左股。荊軻廢，乃引其匕首以擲秦王，不中，中桐柱。秦王復擊軻，軻被八創。軻自知事不就，倚柱而笑，箕踞以罵曰：「事所以不成者，以欲生劫之，必得約契以報太子也。」於是左右既前殺軻，秦王不怡者良久。²⁵⁹

At the same time, the attending physician Xia Wuju used the medicine bag he was carrying to batter Jing Ke. When the King of Qin was running around the pillar, he did not know what to do since he was in a panic and rushing about. His attendants therefore said, “Your majesty, put the sword [on your back].” Putting the sword on his back, [the king] finally drew it and attacked Jing Ke, slicing his left thigh. Jing Ke, staggering to the ground, then raised the dagger and hurled it at the king. It struck not [the king], but the bronze pillar. The King of Qin attacked Jing Ke again. Ke, wounded in eight places, was aware that this affair would not be completed. Leaning against the pillar and laughing, he splayed his legs and scolded: “The reason why the affair was not completed is that I wished to capture you alive, get the covenants²⁶⁰ for certain to repay the Crown Prince [Dan].” Meanwhile, the attendants rushed forward to kill Ke. The King of Qin was dismayed for a very long time.

In addition to Jing Ke and Qin Wuyang, there presented the King and his ministers were present in the hall. Since there was no way for Sima to describe all of these characters at once, we see his shots shift from one angle to another. He starts with the scared expression of Qin Wuyang on his face and then moves to the map. Next, the close-up goes back and forth between the King and Jing as Jing attempts to stab the King

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ In the plan of Dan, the ideal goal is to force the King of Qin to sign documents with lords and return their territory, which had been occupied by Qin. Therefore, the covenants refer to the imagined agreement in this plan.

and the King tried to evade him. Then we are told the reactions of ministers. Finally, we are directed back to the main characters in this scene again, the King and Jing Ke, including the King's counterattack, Jing's last words, and the King's lingering fear.

So far, I have discussed why narratives present simultaneous actions or events by manipulating the story order. There also comes the question why the historian presents one character first, and the others later, even though the reader is informed that all were acting simultaneously. In the example of the battle at Xingyang, although all the four powerful parties were operating at the same time, Sima Qian presents them in a reasonable order, so that the reader could understand the circumstances. First, among the four powers, the main rivals are Liu and Xiang, while Peng and Han both confronted Xiang's army as well. Starting with the general situation that Liu and Xiang were stalemated in Gong is helpful for setting up the layout. Meanwhile, Xiang was distracted by Peng's attack on Dong'e. Liu took advantage of this distraction and regained Chenggao when Xiang returned. At the same time, because of Peng's many attacks on Chu's supply, Xiang had the famous conversation with Liu about boiling his father. The operations of Peng in turn impacted Xiang's actions and decisions. Since Peng's actions affected Xiang's military operation, Peng's actions are always introduced before Xiang's responses. Finally, the scene comes back to a direct negotiation in the form of a conversation, focusing on the main rivals again. This order emphasizes the significance of having an alliance, which Xiang probably had never thought of.

In the assassination scene, *Shi ji*, again, first presents the two major characters, the King and Jing. All the reactions of the Qin ministers, including their facial expressions and conversations, depend on the interaction between the King and Jing, although all the characters are present in this scene at the same time. The focus switches back to the King and Jing, because the King follows his ministers' advice to grab his sword on his back. This episode finally ends with the two leading characters in this scene: Jing's final words and the King's fears. This quick switch of close-up is a good fit for such a nerve-wracking scene. The detailed depiction of how they chased around the pillar shows that Jing Ke was not well-prepared for the assassination.

3.3.3 Prolepses

I divide prolepses in the *Shi ji* into three types: comments about a character, tactical planning regarding a political decision, especially military operations, and destiny as suggested by divinations and songs. The first type refers to analytic descriptions of a historical personage in a narrative, largely relating to his or her personality. The second type refers to discussions of circumstances, consequences, or effects before a tactic or military action is carried out. The last type involves divinations (including turtle shell and milfoil) and ditties that predict the development of narratives. The first and second type can sometimes be mixed. Analysis of a character's personality impinges significantly on

political and military strategies, since it may directly lead to a victory or defeat.²⁶¹ An example of this mixed type will be provided later in this section. Regardless of the differences in the subjects and contents of the prolepsis, all these three types reinforce the accuracy of predictions, illustrating historical process in the narratives through the correspondence between a prolepsis and its fulfillment.

“The Biography of Wu Zixu”²⁶² is a typical example of character analysis in the *Shi ji*, in which a character’s personality explains his or her actions. In Chapter One, I use this example to show that historians offer their comments on a character through the mouth of another character. It is an indication of the intrusion on the part of the historian. Here I use this example to illustrate the manipulation of temporal order and its effects in *Shi ji*. When Wu Zixu’s father learns that the state of Chu is going to trick his two sons, he analyzes their personalities and predicts their decisions. His predictions are precise: Wu Shang returns to Wu, is trapped and executed together with his father; Zixu flees to the state of Wu, endures sufferings in order to avenge his father and brother, leading to years of military attacks by Wu on Chu. This narrative would still work if we were to remove this prediction and just summarize the two sons’ decisions. But the difference brought by adding the prediction introduces Wu Zixu’s characteristics, such as toughness, endurance, and willingness to use violence. These traits explain his actions on his path to

²⁶¹ Songs, ditties, and poems form a category of prolepses. For more on this issue, see Kern, “The Poetry of Han Historiography,” 2004; Scaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” 1999.

²⁶² *SJ* 66.

wreak vengeance on Chu, his success and frustrations advising the two generations of kings of Wu²⁶³, and his death.

Another example is “The Biography of Lord Shang.”²⁶⁴ Wei Yang 衛鞅 (? 395-338 B.C.E.), is also referred as Gongsun Yang 公孫鞅, Shang Yang 商鞅, *Shangjun* 商君 Lord of Shang). He was a minor functionary working for the Prime Minister of Wei, Gongshu Cuo 公叔座 (座) (?-360 B.C.E.), before he went to Qin and initiated a series of reforms with the support of Lord Xiao of Qin 秦孝公 (381-338 B.C.E.). The excerpt below describes how Gongshu Cuo, on his deathbed, recommended Wei Yang as the next Prime Minister to the king, and how Wei Yang himself reacted to this conversation.

鞅少好刑名之學，事魏相公叔座為中庶子。公叔座知其賢，未及進。會座病，魏惠王親往問病，曰：「公叔病有如不可諱，將奈社稷何？」公叔曰：「座之中庶子公孫鞅，年雖少，有奇才，願王舉國而聽之。」王嘿然。王且去，座屏人言曰：「王即不聽用鞅，必殺之，無令出境。」王許諾而去。公叔座召鞅謝曰：「今者王問可以為相者，我言若，王色不許我。我方先君後臣，因謂王即弗用鞅，當殺之。王許我。汝可疾去矣，且見禽。」鞅曰：「彼王不能用君之言任臣，又安能用君之言殺臣乎？」卒不去。惠王既去，而謂左右曰：「公叔病甚，悲乎，欲令寡人以國聽公孫鞅也，豈不悖哉！」公叔既死，公孫鞅聞秦孝公下令國中求賢者，將修繆公之業，東復侵地，乃遂西入秦。²⁶⁵

Yang was fond of the teachings of performance and title. He served as *zhongshu zi* to the Prime Minister of Wei, Gongshu Cuo. Gongshu Cuo recognized his talent but had not yet recommended him for advancement. When Cuo was ill, King Hui of Wei went in person to inquire about his sickness and

²⁶³ Helü (?-496 B.C.E.) and his son, Fu Chai 夫差 (?-473 B.C.E.).

²⁶⁴ *SJ* 68.

²⁶⁵ *SJ* 68. 2227-28.

said, “If Guoshu’s sickness cannot be avoided, what can I do with our altars of the soil and grain?”

Gongshu said, “Cuo’s *zhongshu zi*, Gongsun Yang, has rare talent, although he is young. I hope Your Majesty will listen to him in all state [affairs].” The king remained silent. When the king was about to leave, Cuo dismissed other people and said, “If you do not heed me and make use of Yang, then be sure to kill him. Do not allow him to cross the border [of Wei].” The king agreed and left.

Gongshu Cuo summoned Yang and apologized, “Just now, when the king asked for a person who can be the Prime Minister, I mentioned, but his expression suggested that [he] did not agree with me. I take the ruler as primary and the minister as secondary. Therefore, I told the king, ‘If you do not to make use of Yang, [you] should kill him.’ The king used his expression to agree with me. You can depart quickly. You are about to be captured.”

Yang said, “At that time, the king was not able to make use of your words to appoint me; [now] how can he use your words to kill me?” [He] did not leave after all. The king left [the house of Gongshu] and said to his attendants:

“Gongshu is seriously ill. It is sad, but he wanted me to entrust Gongsun Yang with the entire state. Isn’t it absurd?!” After Gongshu died, Gongsun Yang heard that King Xiao of Qin issued a command to seek for talented people in his state, hoping to continue the achievement of King Mu and recover the lost lands in the east. Yang, therefore, went west and entered Qin.

Later in this biography, we learn that Wei Yang leads the Qin army to attack Wei by playing tricks on the general of Wei. Wei is defeated and gives some territory to Qin in order to make peace with Qin. Moreover, in order to secure of the capital, Wei relocated its capital in Daliang in the east. King Hui of Wei then regretted that he did not heed Gongshu’s words.²⁶⁶

The above example deserves particular attention because it includes predictions about Wei Yang’s career, the King’s reactions to Gongshu Cuo’s sharply contrasting

²⁶⁶ Wei Yang’s attack on the State of Wei was a completely surprise for the state of Wei because Wei Yang originally wrote a letter to a son of the Lord of Wei, in which he proposed a covenant to solve the tension between Qin and Wei. In fact, Wei Yang took advantage of his friendship with the son of Wei, captured him, and won a victory over the Wei.

suggestions, and Wei Yang's own predictions regarding the King's attitude. These predictions form contrasts. Gongshu's prediction has three parts: the first, which evaluates Wei's rare talent and states that he is likely to go to another state, was confirmed; the second, which suggests that Wei Yang will be killed, was not. This contrast is sharp for the reason that Wei Yang's prediction is a prediction about Gongshu Cuo's prediction, and that Wei Yang's prediction is more precise than Gongshu Cuo's. The latter was verified by the King's comment "Gongshu is seriously sick. It is sad. [He] wanted me to listen to Gongsun Yang with the entire state. Isn't it absurd?" The third part, an implicit prediction, is that if the king does not either employ or kill Yang, he will live to regret it.²⁶⁷

From the predictions of Gongshu Cuo, we learn that he was an insightful counselor, but the comparison between him and Wei Yang highlights Wei Yang's higher degree of *qicai* 奇才 (rare talents). Wei Yang's rare talent, in turn, explains his series of reforms, the accomplishments of these reforms, and his tricky attack on the State of Wei, and so on.²⁶⁸ Although these predictions are not directly connected as causes to the

²⁶⁷ The prediction that Wei Yang would go to another state is indirect and related to the previous evaluation that Wei has rare talent. Although Gongshu does not explicitly say that Wei Yang will depart from Wei, since he clearly suggests not letting Wei Yang depart from the border of Wei, this prediction can be inferred. Literally speaking, *you qicai* 有奇才 is not a prediction; but it is counted as an evocation of a future event, as it is verified with Wei Yang's precise diction and in line with Genette's understanding of prolepsis. See *SJ* 68. 2227. This verification is highlighted later in this chapter by the speech of King Hui, who deeply regrets that he does not had heeded Gongshu's advice.

²⁶⁸ Wei Yang confronted the opposition of the conservative camp in the court. In a debate, he explained why Qin needed to reform rather than following the old institutions. In order to reinforce the

examples, I have listed here and the episodes described in the chapter on Wei Yang, because they actually do implicitly lay out a foundation at the beginning of this chapter.

This is as the same as the prediction by Zhao Liang 趙良 in his response to a question from Wei Yang, “You have observed my administration of Qin; who is more talented, Grandee Five Goatskins or I? 子觀我治秦也，孰與五穀大夫賢？”²⁶⁹ Zhao Liang provides some suggestions and reminds Wei Yang that if King Xiao of Qin were to die, his opponents in Qin would have many reasons to capture him. Wei Yang refuses to listen to Zhao Liang’s suggestions. After King Xiao dies, his son King Huiwen ascends the throne. A brother of King Xiao, Qian 虔, who was previously punished by Wei Yang, reports to the new king that Wei Yang has revolted. Therefore, Wei Yang is killed and later *chelle* 車裂 (quartered by a horse). Again, Zhao Liang’s comments on Wei Yang’s administration are not explicitly introduced as a reason leading to Wei Yang’s tragedy, but the precise response between Zhao Liang’s prediction and Wei Yang’s final scene indirectly invites the reader to consider whether the comments of Zhao Liang were rational.

implementation of his new policies, he had a log in front of the south gate of the capital and said that anyone can get a big amount of bonus.

²⁶⁹ Grandee Five Goatskins refers to a crucial minister called Bailixi 百里奚, who made great contributions to the development of Qi during Lord Mu’s reign (659-621B.C.E.). Bailixi used to be a slave in Chu. Lord Mu heard of his exceptional talent. He used five goatskins to trade for Bailixi who was formerly and entrusted Qin’s state affairs to him.

These examples reveal the functions of predictions or adumbrations of events that happen later in a narrative. Most importantly, these predications and evocations introduce new information about characters, such as their personalities, talents, abilities, and other traits, which in many cases, serve as a source of causality or as a foundation for later plot developments. It is to be noted that this information comes from the mouths of other characters in the narratives rather than the historian. In the previous examples, Sima did not introduce either Wu Zixu or Wei Yang, but readers are still able to learn their general features. As discussed in Chapter 1, historians let their characters speak for them.

The second category of prolepses in the *Shi ji* centers on the discussions involving military operations and significant political decisions. A precise prediction in these situations is the basic element of a good scheme. But more important than that, the fulfillment, usually conveyed through the repetition of key phrases or a brief recapitulation of the prediction, strongly suggests the rationality of an insight. It in turn verifies the logic underlying the speaker's analysis. The predictions of Kuai Tong 蒯通 in "The Biography of Marquis of Huaiyin" serve not only as a good example of this category of prolepsis in the *Shi ji* but also furnishes an illustrative comparison between narratives in the *Shi ji* and their counterparts in the *Hanshu*.

Han Xin 韓信 (230-196 B.C.E.) was a brilliant general who, as we have seen, had a substantial role to play in the conflict between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang. His military achievements contributed significantly to the founding of the Han. My excerpt of the

Battle of Chenggao in the previous section briefly mentions that Liu Bang obtains Han Xin's army and is therefore able to hold out long enough to fight against Xiang.

Originally, Han Xin serves in the camp of Xiang Yu. He joins the troop led by Xiang and his uncle when they first starts the revolution. On several occasions, he proposes his strategies to Xiang but receives little attention; therefore, he goes to Liu's side to seek for opportunities. In a remarkable contrast to Xiang, Liu entrusts all the troops to Han Xin, who has not established any reputation at all. He shortly becomes an important figure and had decisive influence over the competition between Xiang and Liu. However, Xiang does not realize that his enemy would become much stronger with the assistance of Han Xin, whom he has consistently ignored. Comparing Liu and Xiang, the former is much better at accessing talent.

After joining Liu, Han Xin soon becomes the general-in-chief, and his extraordinary military talent is validated in a series of well-known battles, bringing him prominence, titles, as well as Liu's distrust. Kuai Tong is serving Han Xin as a schemer in 202 B.C.E., when Chu and Han are locked in a stalemate in the central plain. Han Xin, meanwhile, has just occupied Qi in the north and thus becomes the third important power, with the potential to change the balance between Chu and Han. The conversation below, between Han Xin and Kuai Tong, happens right after the messengers sent by Liu and Xiang each persuade Han Xin to stand on their side.

I divide Kuai's exchanges with Han Xin, which deal with the question whether Han Xin should claim independence from Liu and become the third competing power, into three portions. The first section describes a blueprint of using the area of Qi as a base, gradually expanding to occupy one-third of the empire and coexisting with Liu and Xiang. In the second section, Kuai Tong makes two points to refute Han Xin's belief that he cannot betray Liu, because Liu was very nice to him ["had been so kind to him" and Liu would, therefore, not do harm him. In the third section, which takes places several days later, Kuai Tong points out the danger of hesitating and urges Han Xin to make a quick decision. I translated part of the second section, where Kuai Tong accurately predicts that Liu will endanger Han Xin once Liu Bang's enemies are vanquished. I also include two important scenes in this chapter: one is when Han Xin is arrested by Liu, and the other is Han Xin's final scene, when he is lured and executed by Empress Dowager Lü.

故臣以為足下必漢王之不危己，亦誤矣。大夫種、范蠡存亡越，霸句踐，立功成名而身死亡。野獸已盡而獵狗烹（烹）。夫以交友言之，則不如張耳之與成安君者也；以忠信言之，則不過大夫種、范蠡之於句踐也。此二人者，足以觀矣。願足下深慮之。且臣聞勇略震主者身危，而功蓋天下者不賞。臣請言大王功略：足下涉西河，虜魏王，禽夏說，引兵下井陘，誅成安君，徇趙，脅燕，定齊，南摧楚人之兵二十萬，東殺龍且，西鄉以報，此所謂功無二於天下，而略不世出者也。今足下戴震主之威，挾不賞之功，歸楚，楚人不信；歸漢，漢人震恐：足下欲持是安歸乎？夫勢在人臣之位而有震主之威，名高天下，竊為足下危之。」²⁷⁰

Therefore, I believe that you are mistaken in thinking that there is no danger in trusting the King of Han. Grandee Zhong and Fan Li saved the doomed state of

²⁷⁰ *SJ* 92. 2625.

Yue and made [King] Goujian a hegemony. [They] established their merits and completed their fame, but they themselves perished. ‘When there is no more wild game, the hunting dog is fried.’ You talk of friendship, but yours is not comparable to that of Zhang Er and Lord Ancheng; you speak of loyalty, but yours does not exceed that of the Grandee officials, Zhong and Fan Li to Goujian. These two cases are enough to perceive. I beg you to consider them deeply. Furthermore, I have heard that people whose bravery and cunning make their ruler tremble are themselves in danger; people whose merit overshadows all under heaven will not be rewarded. I beg to speak of your merits and cunning: You crossed the western reaches of the Yellow River, captured the King of Wei, apprehended Xia Yue, led the troops to conquer Jingxing, killed Lord Cheng’an, subdued Zhao, terrified Yan, pacified Qi, destroyed the 200,000 men of Chu, killed Long Ju in the east, and turned west to report [to the King of Han]. This is what is meant by ‘merit that is not inferior to anyone under heaven and cunning that no one can exceed for generations.’ Now you wield enough power to make a sovereign tremble and have won more merit than can be rewarded. If you follow to Chu, the people of Chu will not trust you; if you follow Han, the people of Han will quake with fear. Which side would you follow with such [merit and cunning] in your possession? Your position is that of a subject, but you possess enough might to make a sovereign tremble and a name praised by all under heaven. I sense the danger for you for these matters.”

.....

上令武士縛信，載後車。信曰：「果若人言，『狡兔死，良狗烹（烹）；高鳥盡，良弓藏；敵國破，謀臣亡。』天下已定，我固當烹！」上曰：「人告公反。」遂械系信。至雒陽，赦信罪，以為淮陰侯。²⁷¹

Emperor (Gaozu) commanded warriors to bind Xin and load him into the rear carriage. Han Xin said, “It is just as people say, ‘When the acute hares are dead, the good dog is fried; when the soaring birds are no more, the good bow is hidden; when the enemy states are defeated, the artful minister is doomed.’ All under heaven has been pacified. I should certainly be fried.”

The emperor said, “Someone reported that you revolted.” Therefore, [the emperor] had him put into fetters. When they arrived in Luoyang, [the emperor] pardoned the crimes of Xin and made him the Marquis of Huaiyin.

.....

²⁷¹ Ibid, 2627.

呂后使武士縛信，斬之長樂鐘室。信方斬，曰：「吾悔不用蒯通之計，乃為兒女子所詐，豈非天哉！」遂夷信三族。高祖已從豨軍來，至，見信死，且喜且憐之。²⁷²

Empress Lü ordered her warriors to bind Xin and executed him in the bell hall of the Palace of Lasting Joy. When he was about to be beheaded, he said, “I regret that I did not make use of Kuai Tong’s scheme. Hence I have been tricked by a woman and her lackey.²⁷³ Is it not [because of] heaven?” [Empress Lü] thereafter exterminated Han Xin’s clan to the third degree of kinship. Gaozu was on his way to meet the army of Chen Xi. [When] he arrived, he learned of the death of Han Xin. He was pleased but pitied him.

In this speech, Kuai Tong uses both examples of historical personages as well as his own contemporaries. Goujian 勾踐 (?520-465 B.C.E.), the King of the State of Yue, achieves a final victory, after fighting with his neighbor for over a decade, only with the help of his two loyal and brilliant ministers, Wen Zhong 文種 and Fan Li 范蠡. After the downfall of Wu, Wen Zhong is forced to commit suicide and Fan Li fled to the north, fearing Goujian’s distrust.²⁷⁴ Kuai Tong’s contemporaries, Zhang Er 張耳 (264-202 B.C.E.) and Chen Yu 陳餘 (?-204 B.C.E.), are each other’s best friends before they compete for power. In the end, Zhang Er wins, and Chen Yu is defeated, at the cost of his own life.

²⁷² Ibid, 2629.

²⁷³ The woman refers to Empress Lü. The lackey refers to the fact that Empress Lü cheated Han Xin to come to the palace.

²⁷⁴ *SJ* 41, “The Hereditary House of King of Yue” 越王勾踐世家. According to this chapter, Fan fled to Qi and achieved huge wealth since he started running business. He once sent a letter from Qi to Wen, suggesting him to flee. The letter reads, “蜚鳥盡，良弓藏；狡兔死，走狗烹。”

Kuai Tong's point is that, if the relationship between Liu Bang and Han Xin is defined as that between ruler and his minister, then it could not that cannot compare to that between Goujian and his counselors, Fan Li and Wenzhong. If the relationship between Liu Bang and Han Xin is defined as friendship, then it cannot compare to the relationship between Zhang Er and Chen Yu. In addition, Han Xin has numerous significant military achievements that would arouse anxiety and distrust in Liu. Kuai Tong uses a similar expression to the analogies by Fan Li that “野獸已盡而獵狗烹” (After the prey are all [caught], the hunting dog [will be] fried) in his prediction. Later, when this prediction is fulfilled, namely when Han Xin is captured by Liu Bang, Han Xin says that this result is just as someone has predicted and he uses a series of analogies to comment on his own destiny.

Han Xin is not killed until Empress Lü²⁷⁵ receives a report of Han Xin's participation in a rebellious conspiracy. In his death scene, he explicitly expresses his regret for rejecting Kuai Tong's strategy when Chu and Han were stalemated, mistakenly contributing his own defeat to Heaven. When he is lured by Empress Lü in the bell hall, he asked rhetorically “[Aren't these things happening] because of Heaven?” This forms a contrast with the third section of Kuai Tong's persuasion, in which he urges Han Xin to

²⁷⁵ Liu Bang was alive at that time. Thus, his wife Lü Zhi is referred as Empress Lü, which is the title for the primary wife of the current emperor. After Liu died, she is referred as Empress Dowager Lü, since her son, Liu Ying 劉盈, also known as Emperor Xiaohui (211-188 B.C.E.) ascended the throne.

make a quick decision. By connecting these scenes Han Xin's end is presented as a result of his own decision.

Kuai Tong not only proposes a plan for a promising future, but also points out the potential danger facing Han Xin is facing. Declining to follow the plan, Han Xin's tragedy corresponds accurately with Kuai Tong's predictions in the form of prolepsis. More specifically, the relationship between Han Xin and Liu Bang and Liu Bang's suspicion regarding Han Xin are both verified. This interaction, through validating the prolepses, highlights Kuai Tong's rhetorical talent and the real reasons for Han Xin's defeat. This effect is further emphasized by twice repeating the analogy of the hunting dogs is repeated in all the three scenes. The prolepses provide a thread for these episodes and produce a strong thematic effect of theme concerning Han Xin's decline from the peak.

In contrast, *Han shu* shortens the prolepsis and its fulfillment in less than four lines as shown below. The major conversation between Kuai Tong and Han Xin is moved without fundamental changes into the "Biographies of Kuai, Wu, Jiang, and Xifu" in the *Han shu*,²⁷⁶ destroying the correspondence between the prolepses and the fulfillment in the scenes depicting in Han Xin's demise.

武涉已去，蒯通知天下權在於信，深說以三分天下（之計）。語在通傳。信不忍背漢，又自以功大，漢王不奪我齊，遂不聽。……高祖令武士縛信，載後車。信曰：「果若人言，『狡兔死，良狗亨。』」上曰：「人告公反。」

²⁷⁶ HS 45.

遂械信。……信方斬，曰：「吾不用蒯通計，反為女子所詐，豈非天哉！」

²⁷⁷

Wu She had already left. Kuai Tong knew that the weight of all under heaven was placed on Han Xin. [Kuai Tong] tried hard to persuade [Han Xin] of the scheme of dividing all under heaven into three, as recorded in the biography of Tong. Han Xin could not bear to Han. He also thought that, because he had a great merit, the King of Han would not take Qi from him. Therefore, he did not listen to [Kuai Tong]...

Emperor Gaozu ordered warriors to bind Xin and put him into the rear carriage. Xin said, "It is really as people say: 'When the cunning hared are dead, the good dog will be fried.'"

The emperor said, "Someone reported that you revolted." Therefore, [the emperor] had him put into fetters...

When Xin was about to be beheaded, he said, "I regret that I did not make use of Kuai Tong's scheme, but have, on the contrary, been tricked by a woman and her lackey. Is it not [because of] heaven?"

Although many of the words in this excerpt are the same as those in the *Shi ji*, they do not produce the same effects. These episodes are heavily reduced and the complicated relationships among them are over-simplified. The fulfillment of Kuai's strategy is very briefly introduced. The correct perception of Liu Bang by Kuai, a determining factor in Han Xin's career, is obscured. Because the thread is broken, Han Xin's characteristics, such as his lack of ambition, determination, and even his final, desperate regret at not having heeded Kuai Tong's words, are lost. Of course, Ban Gu, (or anyone else, who may have written this chapter,) may have never intended to characterize these two personages in the same way that Sima Qian did; but, regardless, of his

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 1874-78.

intentions, his approaches to relating information regarding Han Xin and Kuai Tong leads to very different aesthetic effects.

One effect is the character development, which refers to the rational transformations of a character from the beginning to the end of his narrative. It usually introduces a short episode involving the protagonists when they are younger or before they rise to fame, in order to reveal a certain personality or guiding philosophy. Technically speaking, they are different from prolepses from the above categories of prolepsis because they do not require precise correspondence between the predictions and their fulfilment. Since this is the main theme in my fifth chapter, I shall just use the example of Han Xin to briefly illustrate this point here.

Indeed, the reduction and reorganization of *Han shu*, in effect, deconstructs the construction of Han Xin's character development by destroying the thread formed by prolepses and their fulfillments. Originally, Han Xin had hesitated and did not believe that Liu Bang would distrust him. The turning-point is when he was captured by Liu Bang. Han Xin was not aware of Liu's distrust until this moment. Thereafter, he realized that, just as Kuai Tong had seen, Liu hated his achievements. Hence, Han Xin frequently refused to pay respectful visit to Liu, but still does not think that his life is in danger. His emotional final words express his deep regret at not having heeded Kuai Tong's advice. In this process, we see how the arch of Han Xin's perception of Liu Bang and character

development is achieved. Character development in *Shi ji* plays a much more important role than in its predecessors, such as *Zuo zhuan*.

Furthermore, the ways of handling the same scenes by *Shi ji* and *Han shu* are remarkably different. The narratological method enables me to notice this difference, which has always been ignored. It is of great interest and significance, because it sheds light on the nature and function of these works. From characters to literary value, from language to objectivity, previous scholarship has compared *Shi ji* and *Han shu* in many aspects. However, their different narrative structures and their effects have not been studied. I argue that the *Shi ji* and *Han shu* emphasize different issues concerning the same characters, which determines how they differ in the narrating way. In short, the *Shi ji* answers how historical events happened, whereas the *Han shu* answers what happened in the past.

Many scholars criticize Sima Qian for being too subjective and emotional. They conclude that *Shi ji* is not an objective history. Comparing it with *Han shu*, they believe that Ban Gu is more objective than Sima and should be treated as the exemplar for historians.²⁷⁸ First, I believe that this is not fair. A historical work's objectivity includes a variety of aspects, such as the selection of materials, historical consciousness, the way of making logical connections among events, and so on. For example, in Chapter 4, I

²⁷⁸ Piao, *Shi ji Han shu bijiao yanjiu*, 61-62. In Piao's discussion, he summarizes that Sima Qian integrated his own emotions into his writing, whereas Ban Gu's writing is less emotional and therefore more objective. He cites Ye Shiqingbing to argue that Sima Qian was more emotional because of his experiences brought about his disastrous involvement in the Li Ling affair.

mention that *Han shu* includes a number of edicts in the “Basic Annals of Empress Lü,” while *Shi ji* does not include a single edict. However, it does not mean that the former is more objective.²⁷⁹

Indeed, the objectivity of *Han shu* is an effect largely produced by its narrative structure. My analysis of Han Xin’s biographies in these works above is a good example. By reducing the persuasive speeches of Kuai Tong from Han Xin’s biography, the reader learns much less information about the circumstance that led Han Xin to reject the betrayal of Liu Bang. Because the prolepses in the *Shi ji* are broken, although his final words are the same as those in *Shi ji*, *Han shu* fails to produce the contrastive effect when the key analogy is repeated. By contrast, the final words of Han Xin in *Shi ji* produce a very strong effect stirring the reader’s emotions.

In this respect, *Shi ji* pays attention to the interactions among various episodes, by distorting the narrative order, constructing a theme, or establishing a thread in a chapter. This feature is so strong that it distinguishes *Shi ji* from other historical works, both earlier and later. Ultimately, this narrative tension and power are achieved through narrative structure. The interrelation among events presents a fuller picture of the situation. Therefore, *Shi ji* answers the *how* questions. In contrast, the *Han shu* cares about “facts” much more than the connections among them. Because of this feature, it answers only the *what* questions.

²⁷⁹ See 4.2.2.2 *How* vs. *What*: The Example of the Empress Dowager Lü, 225.

The last category of prolepses in the *Shi ji* involves divinations, but a common feature of many divinations is that, from the prolepsis to its fulfillment, the human being's actions are always integrated. The development of history in *Shi ji* is always a result of the interplay between Heaven and human beings, instead of the simplified causality in *Zuo zhuan*. For example, the two divinations about Chen Wan 陳完 (also known as Tian Wan 田完 and, his posthumously, Jingzhong 敬仲) and his posterity are integrated into narratives in both *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*.²⁸⁰ Chen Wan was the son of Lord Li of Chen 陳厲公 (r. 706-700 B.C.E.) and later fled to Qi in order to avoid political disaster. For the current discussion in this section, I will confine myself to the effects of the two prolepses in the narratives.

In the beginning of this chapter, Sima introduces two divinations about Chen: one takes place not long after he is born, the other when the statesman, Yi Zhong considers marrying his daughter to Chen. It reads:

陳完者，陳厲公他之子也。完生，周太史過陳，陳厲公使卜完，卦得觀之否：「是為觀國之光，利用賓于王。此其代陳有國乎？不在此而在異國乎？非此其身也，在其子孫。若在異國，必姜姓。姜姓，四嶽之後。物莫能兩大，陳衰，此其昌乎？」……莊公卒，立弟杵臼，是為宣公。宣公〔二〕十一年，殺其太子御寇。御寇與完相愛，恐禍及己，完故奔齊。齊懿仲欲妻完，卜之，占曰：「是謂鳳皇于蜚，和鳴鏘鏘。有媯之後，將育于姜。五世其昌，并于正卿。八世之後，莫之與京。」卒妻完。²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ ZZ, Zhuang 22.1, 230-34, and SJ 46. The date of Chen Wan is not clear; but he is a contemporary of Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (685-643 B.C.E.). When Chen fled to Qi, Lord Han had ascended the throne for fourteen years, according to this chapter in the *Shi ji*.

²⁸¹ SJ 46. 1879-80.

Chen Wan was the son of Lord Li of Chen, whose name was Ta. After Wan was born, the Grand Historian of Zhou visited Chen. Lord Li of Chen had him divine on behalf of Wan by using the turtle-shell. [The historian] obtained the hexagram of “Viewing” and the line whereby it becomes the hexagram “Obstruction”²⁸²: This is ‘One views the light of the state, benefits will be obtained by the king. Will he have a state on behalf of Chen? Not here but in a different state? It is not he himself, but his descendant. If it is in different state, [the state] must be [ruled] by the Jiang surname. The Jiangs are descendants of the Four Peaks. Among things, there cannot be two of equal greatness. As Chen declines, his line will prosper!’ Lord Zhuang died. His younger brother, Chujiu, succeeded him. This was Lord Xuan. In the 21st year of Lord Xuan’s reign, [Lord Xuan] killed the Crown Prince, Yukou. [Since] Yukou and Wan were fond of each other and [Wan] was afraid that misfortune would reach him, Wan fled to Qi. Yizhong in Qi wished to marry him [to his daughter] and divined about it. The divination said, “The male and female phoenixes soar in fight. One responds the other harmoniously. The descendant of Wei will be raised among the Jiang. In five generations, they will flourish and stand alongside the chief ministers. In eight generations, none will be able to compete with them.” Yizhong finally married [his daughter] to Wan.

The divinations clearly say that it is not Chen Wan but his posterity who will be prominent in a state associated with the surname Jiang. As predicted by the two divinations, the Tian clan becomes a highly powerful clan several generations later, and is even able to manipulate the King of Qi. However, during the gradual and entire process of replacing the Jiang rulers, Sima twice describes the tactics that the Tian lineage used to win the favor of commoners in Qi, providing a consistent thread of development for the narrative. A few generations after Chen Wan, Tian Qi 田乞 (posthumously titled Li 釐/Xi 僖 and therefore also known as Viscount Xi of Chen 陳僖子, Viscount Li of Chen 陳

²⁸² See footnote 242 on page 146.

釐子, and Viscount Li of Tian 田釐子), served Lord Jing of Qi 齊景公 (547-490 B.C.E.). He collected tax from people by using a relatively small measuring vessel, but lent grain to them by using a bigger measuring vessel. When the Prime Minister, Yan Ying 晏嬰, goes to the state of Jin, he secretly tells Shuxiang 叔向 that the government of Qi will finally go to the clan of Tian (齊國之政卒歸於田氏矣). Indeed, this is the third prolepsis from a character involved in the narrative, and it agrees with the two previous ones.

After Lord Jing dies, Tian Qi is not satisfied with his new ruler, a son by Lord Jing's beloved concubine, Tu 荼; he therefore deliberately sows chaos among the ministers and later installs another son of Lord Jing, with whom he has a closer relationship. This is Lord Dao of Qi 齊悼公 (r. 488-485 B.C.E.). At the end of this episode, we read "after Lord Dao was installed, Tian Qi became the Prime Minister and monopolized power in Qi" (悼公既立, 田乞為相, 專齊政). After Tian Qi dies, his son Tian Chang 田常 becomes one of the two prime ministers and intends to have all the power in his hands; he therefore again uses the tactic of the measuring vessels to win the people's support. After that, worse than his father, he not only forces Lord Jian of Qi 齊簡公 to flee, but also kills him and installs Lord Ping 平公 (d. 456 B.C.E.), Lord Jian's younger brother. Afterwards, he becomes the only prime minister at court and monopolizes power in Qi within five years (齊國之政皆歸田常). After three more generations of ambitious and capable leaders, Tian Chang's grandson, Tian He 田和 is

finally recognized by the Zhou court and legitimately becomes one of the lords, with the title Marquis of Qi.²⁸³ As discussed previously, all the three prolepses of the prominence of the Tian lineage in Qi, two in the form of divinations and one in Yan Ying's speech, are accurately fulfilled.

In this course, *Shi ji* can be seen to presents the historical events by intertwining destiny with the efforts of human efforts. This is a crucial feature of *Shi ji*, representing its encyclopedic feature, as shown in Chapter 2. But how is this feature achieved from the perspective of narrative structure? The example of Tian's usurpation in Qi shows that, the evocations of future events in the form of predictions and divinations not only thread together episodes in the narrative and create tension, but also introduce a point of concern throughout the *Shi ji*: the mythical power is intimately related to the rise and decline of a state, family, and individual, and is beyond the control of humans. Meanwhile, the narrative describes the goals of Tian Qi and Tian Chang and their behavior with specific details, suggesting the Tian lineage's replacement of the Jiang lineage as rulers of Qi does not solely result from predestination. Their repeated pattern is: first, they win the people's support; second, they replace the King as they see fit; then, they manipulate the newly installed lord and concentrate power by becoming the Prime Minister. This pattern conveys the entire process on their part.

²⁸³ The state of Qi was originally enfeoffed by King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (?-1043 B.C.E.) to Jiang Shang 姜尚. In 386 B.C.E., Tian He officially took Qi over from the Jiang lineage. King Ping of Zhou listed it as one of the feudal states.

Zuo zhuan also contains the same two divinations. However, two differences are worth noting: unlike *Shi ji* which uses prolepses in its narrative, *Zuo zhuan* uses the two predictions as analepses to explain the Tian's usurpation in Qi; and, in *Zuo zhuan*, the section from the divination to their fulfillment is remarkably laconic. More detailed discussion of the prominence of the Tian clan will be treated in the next section, which examines the forms and functions of analepsis in the *Zuo zhuan*.

In addition to setting up the causalities among episodes in a narrative, prolepsis also produces aesthetic effects. These prolepses create tension and drive the plot development, enticing the reader to keep reading in order to see whether the narrative is going to be in accord with the predications. In the two previous examples, the prolepses by Wu's father and Gongshu Cuo predict the actions of the protagonists, enticing the readers to follow the narrative. Readers therefore learn more about the heroes and set up logical connections between the predictions at the beginning and the hero's choice in his life. It is to be noted that predictions are crucial to the construction of supporting roles—the characters who offer commentary on the heroic protagonists—such as Wu Zixu's father and Gongshu Cuo in the two previous examples. The episode of Wei Yang shows that Gongshu was good at recognizing people's talents, such as the likelihood that Wei Yang would seek opportunities in another state, from the King's subtle facial expressions.

3.3.4 Analepses

In contrast to following a chronological timeline, another way of manipulating narrative order is to use markers indicating that the narrator is about to tell something that happened earlier. Thus, like prolepses, there are at least two narratives in an analepsis, a primary one called first narrative and a secondary one inserted into the former. Since *Shi ji* generally follows a chronological order, there are not many analepses. Most of them are rather short, inserted as a factor leading to an event. Lord Mu of Qin's capture of Lord Hui of Jin, discussed in Section 4.1.2, is a good example.

The most common signal alerting readers to an analepsis is *chu* 初 (“some time earlier”), usually without having a subject in front of it. Other three words with similar functions, but usually after a subject, are *chang* 嘗 (“once,” like Latin *olim*), *shi* 始 (“one upon a time,” “at first”), and *xi* 昔 (“in the past”). In the example involving Lord Mu of Qin, the analepsis starts with *chu*, indicating the insertion of a past event. Temporal adverbial phrase ending with the word, *shi* 時, is occasionally used to describe a short retrospection and is usually followed by a brief description of a later situation, forming a sharp contrast. “The Biography of Prime Minister Cao” reads:

參始微時，與蕭何善；及為將相，有卻。至何且死，所推賢唯參。參代何為漢相國，舉事無所變更，一遵蕭何約束。²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ *SJ* 54.2029.

When Cao Can was humble at the beginning, [he] got along well with Xiao He; when they became General and Prime Minister, [they] had conflicts. When Xiao He was about to die, the only talent whom he recommended was Cao Can. Cao Can replaced Xiao He as the Prime Minister of Han, and there were no changes in policy. [He] fully complied with Xiao He's covenants.

Sometimes there is no specific marker indicating chronological order; the pattern “..... (者),也” (X is ...) is used to introduce a character and lead the readers to go over his or her profile, which possibly contains an analepsis. This pattern appears repeatedly in the first few sentences of almost every narrative chapter. However, when this pattern appears in the middle of a narrative, it is an indication of inserted information. For example, in the “Biographies of Marquis Weiji and Wu'an,” the reckless trouble maker, Guan Fu 灌夫 (?-131 B.C.E.) is introduced in the middle of the chapter with details including his family, his deeds, and personality as revealed during the seven-state chaos created by Wu and Chu (吳楚之亂).

The goal of reprising the past is usually to indicate reasons for the next coming event. The strength of the relationship between cause and effect depends on the distance between them in the text: the closer, the stronger. This is helpful for emphasizing the causal relationship between two events.

A narrative inserted with these signals facilitates the development of the plot, so that the reader will not get supervised and confused when he or she reaches the key point. A large proportion of “The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” consists of battle scenes, as one can see in earlier sections. One of them is known as the Battle of Julu 巨鹿之戰, in which

armies of the Qin general, Zhang Han 章邯 (?-205 B.C.E.), and Xiang Yu confronted one another. This battle became possible only after Xiang became the General-in-chief.

Before the insertion, Xiang has no power to command any army. In order to prepare the reader well, the narrator inserts a section introducing Xiang's assassination of Song Yi 宋義, who was the previous General-in-Chief. Xiang then replaces Song. With the army under his control, Xiang establishes his reputation and all his later actions become possible. It reads:

楚兵已破於定陶，懷王恐，從盱臺之彭城，并項羽、呂臣軍自將之。以呂臣為司徒，以其父呂青為令尹。以沛公為碭郡長，封為武安侯，將碭郡兵。²⁸⁵

When the forces of Chu were defeated at Dingtao, King Huai was afraid. [He] went to Pengcheng from Xuyi, combined the armies of Xiang Yu, Lü Chen, and took command himself. He appointed Lü Chen as Minister of Education, his father, Lü Qing, as the Prime Minister, Lord Pei as the head of Dang Province. [He] was enfeoffed as the Marquis of Wuan and was given command of the troops of Dang.

初，宋義所遇齊使者高陵君顯在楚軍，見楚王曰：「宋義論武信君之軍必敗，居數日，軍果敗。兵未戰而先見敗徵，此可謂知兵矣。」王召宋義與計事而大說之，因置以為上將軍，項羽為魯公，為次將，范增為末將，救趙。諸別將皆屬宋義，號為卿子冠軍。行至安陽，留四十六日不進。……項羽晨朝上將軍宋義，即其帳中斬宋義頭，出令軍中曰：「宋義與齊謀反楚，楚王陰令羽誅之。」²⁸⁶

Some time earlier, the envoy of Qi, Xian, whom Song Yi encountered, was in the Chu camp. [He] met the King of Chu and said, "Song Yi contended that the army of Lord Wuxin would be defeated for certain. Several days later, it

²⁸⁵ *SJ* 7. 304.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 304-305.

was in fact defeated. He who read the signs of defeat before the army engage in the battle can be said to understand the [art] of warfare.”

The king then summoned Song Yi, calculated issues with him, and was very delighted with him. Therefore, [the king] appointed him as General-in-Chief, Xiang Yu as the Lord of Lu, the second general, and Fan Zeng as the third general, to rescue the state of Zhao. All the other generals were placed under the command of Song Yi, who was titled “Honored-Master Highest in the Army.” When the troop arrived in Anyang, they stopped for forty-six days and did not proceed... When Xiang Yu met the General-in-Chief, Song Yi, in the morning, he cut off his head inside his tent. He went outside and commanded the army, saying “Song Yi schemed with Qi to rebel against Chu. The King of Chu secretly ordered me to kill him.”

當是時，諸將皆懼服，莫敢枝梧。皆曰：「首立楚者，將軍家也。今將軍誅亂。」乃相與共立羽為假上將軍。使人追宋義子，及之齊，殺之。使桓楚報命於懷王。懷王因使項羽為上將軍，當陽君、蒲將軍皆屬項羽。項羽已殺卿子冠軍，威震楚國，名聞諸侯。乃遣當陽君、蒲將軍將卒二萬渡河，救鉅鹿。²⁸⁷

Meanwhile, all the generals were scared and obeyed. No one dared to raise any objection. They all said, “The first one to set up the royal family of Chu was General [Xiang]’s family. Now the general has executed the [one who fomented] chaos.” Then, [they] mutually assented to establish Xiang Yu as Acting General-in-Chief. Someone was sent to pursue the son of Song Yi. When [the deputy] reached him in Qi, [the deputy] murdered him. Huan Chu was sent to report to King Huai. King Huai therefore appointed Xiang Yu as the General-in-Chief. Lord Dangyang and General Pu were all placed under the command of Xiang Yu. After Xiang Yu killed the Honored-Master Highest in the Army, his might shocked Chu and his fame was heard by lords. He then dispatched Lord Dangyang and General Pu to lead two thousand soldiers to cross the Yellow River and rescue Julu.

In this example, the reprise is not an event but a series of events grouped together, which account for Xiang Yu’s increased power. With the revolution started in 210 B.C.E., many lords organized armies and claimed to restore their state before Qin’s unification of

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 306-307.

China. The Qin general, Zhang Han, defeated lords in the previous state of Zhao. The insertion begins with the marker *chu*. King Huai makes Song Yi the General-in-Chief, Xiang Yu the secondary general as well as Lord of Lu, and Fan Zeng the third general 末將, to rescue Zhao. King Huai, therefore, commands Song as well as other subordinate generals, including Xiang, to rescue Zhao. Xiang has no army of his own. When Xiang Yu later disagrees with Song's strategy of waiting in Anyang rather than rushing to rescue Zhao, Song insists and commands the army that anyone who break his rules will be executed. Xiang is enraged and therefore unexpectedly kills Song one morning; the other generals obeyed Xiang and make him the Acting General-in-Chief. Later, King Huai also commands Xiang to be the real General-in-Chief. The armies of Lord Dangyang and General Pu all come to belong to Xiang.

Before he kills Song, Xiang is merely one of several competing generals in the camp of Chu. After killing Song, Xiang thus had the control of all the armies of Chu. This change in Xiang's power is directly linked to his prominence among the lords soon after he defeats Qin's army in Zhao. Thereafter, he is the General-in-Chief of armies of all the lords, who becomes the followers of Xiang Yu. Without the inserted narrative about killing Song, readers would be confused about Xiang's victory of rescuing Zhao with questions such as: Where did Xiang get his armies and how could he became the leader of the lords? The analepsis fills in this gap and also paves the way for upcoming episodes, such as the Banquet at Hongmen.

Sometimes, the inserted narrative does not contain a series of logically and chronologically interlocked events; nonetheless, it includes several factors that can explain the result, adding to the complexity of the events. In the “Hereditary Houses of the Families Related to the Emperors by Marriage,” the rise of Wei Zifu is related to the downfall of Emperor Wu’s first Empress, Empress Chen. Chen’s mother, Emperor Wu (Liu Che)’s aunt, and had greatly contributed to his ascendancy. It reads:

衛子夫得見，涕泣請出。上憐之，復幸，遂有身，尊寵日隆。召其兄衛長君弟青為侍中。而子夫後大幸，有寵，凡生三女一男。男名據。²⁸⁸

When Wei Zifu obtained the chance to meet [the emperor], she wept and begged to go out of [the palace]. The emperor pitied her and favored her once more. Thereupon, she became pregnant and her honor and the emperor’s favor increased day by day. [The emperor] summoned her older brother, Changjun, and younger brother, Wei Qing, to be palace attendants. Thereafter, Zifu enjoyed extraordinary favor with the emperor. She bore him three daughters and a son. The son’s name was Ju.

初，上為太子時，娶長公主女為妃。立為帝，妃立為皇后，姓陳氏，無子。上之得為嗣，大長公主有力焉，以故陳皇后驕貴。²⁸⁹

Some time earlier, when the Emperor Wu was Crown Prince, he had married the daughter of the Grand Princess as the consort. [The Crown] ascended the throne and the consort ascended as Empress, with Chen as her last name. [She] had no children. The Grand Princess contributed to the Emperor’s becoming successor. For this reason, Empress Chen was haughty and gave herself airs of grandeur.

聞衛子夫大幸，恚，幾死者數矣。上愈怒。陳皇后挾婦人媚道，其事頗覺，於是廢陳皇后，而立衛子夫為皇后。²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ *SJ* 49. 1978-79.

²⁸⁹ *SJ* 49. 1979.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

When she heard that Wei Zifu had won great favor [of the emperor], she was furious and was several times on the verge of death. The emperor became even more enraged. Empress Chen resorted to the way of female sorcery. The affair was detected. Therefore, [the emperor] dismissed Empress Chen and installed Wei Zifu as the Empress.

陳皇后母大長公主，景帝姊也，數讓武帝姊平陽公主曰：「帝非我不得立，已而棄捐吾女，豈何不自喜而倍本乎！」平陽公主曰：「用無子故廢耳。」陳皇后求子，與醫錢凡九千萬，然竟無子。²⁹¹

The mother of Empress Chen, the Grand Princess, was the older sister of Emperor Jing. She scolded the older sister of Emperor Wu, Princess Pingyang, and said: “The emperor would not have been able to ascend the throne without me. Not long after, he discarded my daughter. What is this but turning one’s back upon basic obligations for the sake of mere self-indulgence?”

Princess Pingyang said, “It is because that [she] has been without child.” Empress Chen tried hard to have a son, paying out as much as 90,000,000 cash in medicine. But to the end she remained childless.

In this case, the historian uses *chu* to go back to the time when Emperor Wu (Liu Che) was still the Crown Prince. This insertion informs us that Emperor Wu married the daughter of the Grand Princess, who later became the Empress but does not bear a son. The real reason for Empress Chen’s decline is that she was overly proud, because of his mother’s support of Emperor Wu from the time he was Crown Prince. Other factors may include her sterility, and Emperor Wu’s ingratitude after his ascendancy, as pointed out by his aunt. But the Grand Princess’s support in making Liu Che the Crown Prince was certainly intertwined with Empress Chen’s downfall.

²⁹¹ *SJ* 49. 1980.

CHAPTER 4

DURATION & MOOD

Any author can control his or her narratives by regulating information in two important dimensions: duration and mood. They essentially concern the amount of information offered in narratives and the angle or perspective of the narration. This chapter examines duration and mood in the *Shi ji* 史記 by comparing several episodes that are also narrated in the *Chun qiu* 春秋, the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, and the *Han shu* 漢書.

I first introduce several definitions under the category of duration, such as speed, ellipse, scene, summary, and pause, and under the category of mood, such terms as distance, mimesis, and perspective under the category of mood. This analysis of the narratives in the *Shi ji* will delineates its manipulation in each respect, and will confirm that *Shi ji* is not just a simple collection of fragments cut-and-pasted from earlier sources.²⁹² Then, I move on to the distance and focalization of the narration in *Shi ji*, two aspects of the mood in which it significantly differs from either the *Zuo zhuan* or the *Han shu*.

²⁹² The originality of the *Shi ji* has been discussed by many scholars because it is the foundation for their analysis and conclusions. In this chapter, by my analyzing durations and mood in the *Shi ji* from a narratological perspective, I show that Sima Qian is a creative narrator. One early critic regarding the originality of Sima Qian in the *Shi ji* dates back to Wang Chong's *Lun heng* 論衡, where Wang underestimated *Shi ji* because of Sima Qian's borrowing from earlier sources and lack of creativity. See *LH* 39.607-608. In addition, this issue was also mentioned by Chavannes who suggested that Sima Qian was perhaps just a cut-and-paste compiler and a patient editor. See his *Mémoires historiques*, I.ccxxv. English translations are available in Klein's dissertation, 6-7. In a sharp contrast, Watson in his *Ssu-ma Ch'ien* explicitly points out Sima Qian's composing ability, 180.

Exploration of these narratological issues will lead to three arguments regarding the narration of *Shi ji* and its distinctive features: first, the mimetic feature (showing) of the *Shi ji* is so remarkable that it differs from both earlier and later historical writings from early imperial China; second, although the narrative perspectives of the *Shi ji* are neither variable nor multiple, the degree of mimesis is improved by switching focalizations in narratives through incorporating the direct speech of the characters, among others;²⁹³ Third, *Shi ji* pays particular attention to small changes, accumulations, and their effects on the direction of history. The reader accesses the reconstruction of the past while the text changes its narrative speed, distance, and focalization.

4.1 *Duration and Its Types*

Duration and several terms relating to it, such as *speed*, are useful for any narrative regardless of its type or language, because a narrator has to inform the reader of two durations: that of the story and that of the narration. Genette notes the difference between the duration of a story and the duration of its counterpart in a narrative.²⁹⁴ Although sometimes it is difficult to measure these durations, we all had the experience of reading a narrative devoting much of its space to an event lasting a few hours, or conversely a narrative that uses one or maybe two sentences to inform the reader of

²⁹³ In addition to speeches, switching of focalizations of characters is achieved through presenting their poems, songs, ditties, essays, memorials to the emperor, and so on. My discussion of focalizations here limits itself to the speeches, the most typical way to present various characters' thoughts.

²⁹⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 86-87.

events over a period of many years. In order to discuss this phenomenon in narration, Genette defines *speed* as “the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages).”²⁹⁵ Technically speaking, it is impossible to construct a narrative at a constant speed. Accelerations or slowdowns exist in every narrative because there is no reason to distribute the same amount of information to each unit of time.

The speed of narration is, thus, entirely up to the author. Historians, as authors writing about historical personages and events, are no exception. Indeed, the speed of their narratives is one way in which historians manipulate their representation of the past. For instance, *Shi ji* is the earliest extant historical text that contains narratives about the Qin Empire from its unification in 221 until its demise in 207 B.C.E. When we read it, our understanding of the past is influenced by the narratives recorded in the *Shi ji*. Thus, the speed of the Qin section in the *Shi ji* significantly impacts our understanding of this dynasty. When it slows down, we know more about the corresponding events; when it speeds up, we have access only to sketchy descriptions.

Of course, the speed of narratives may be affected by other factors. The sources underlying the narrative may be limited. Other factors include time that can be offered, the historian’s perception and interpretation of history, and so on. Sima Qian comments

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 87-88.

on the sources available to Confucius when he compiled *Chun qiu* and *Shang shu* 尚書 (Book of Documents). First, Confucius lacked records about the Five Thearchs (*wudi* 五帝) of antiquity and the Three Dynasties. Second, the inconsistencies and conflicts in the sources put the historian in a difficult position. In the preface of “Genealogical Table of the Three Dynasties,” Sima Qian tries to explain the difficulty that Confucius confronted.

五帝、三代之記，尚矣。自殷以前諸侯不可得而譜，周以來乃頗可著。孔子因史文次春秋，紀元年，正時日月，蓋其詳哉。至於序尚書則略，無年月；或頗有，然多闕，不可錄，故疑則傳疑，蓋其慎也。余讀諜記，黃帝以來皆有年數。稽其歷譜諜終始五德之傳，古文咸不同，乖異。夫子之弗論次其年月，豈虛哉！²⁹⁶

The records of the Five Thearchs and Three Dynasties are about the distant [past]! From the Yin Dynasty and before, [records about] the lords are not obtainable as the basis for a genealogy. Only from the Zhou onwards can [the genealogies] be fully constructed. [Since] Confucius organized/sequenced the *Spring and Autumn* according to the historical and other writings, noting the first year of each reign, and correcting the [calculation] of hours, days, and months, thus these [historical texts] should be detailed. When he turned to arranging the *Documents*, it was sketchy and did not have the year and month [of each event]. Or [he] might have some [materials], but in many cases they were lacking. Therefore, they could not be recorded. Thus, when he was in doubt, he transmitted his doubts. It was probably because of his circumspection. I have read his genealogies and records. They provide the number of years in each reign from the Yellow Emperor on. [I] have examined the chronologies and genealogies [on which they were based], as well as the “Traditions of the Cycle of the Five Virtues.” These ancient texts all differ and conflict with [each other]. Is it not false that the Master did not discuss nor arrange their years and months?

As for his own writing, Sima Qian had a similar problem. He mentions his lack of documents and records several times in the *Shi ji*, especially the scarcity of the records

²⁹⁶ *SJ* 13, 487.

about the states. The Qin kept the other states' historical records, but by 100 B.C.E., they were sketchy and outdated.

秦既得意，燒天下詩書，諸侯史記尤甚，為其有所刺譏也。詩書所以復見者，多藏人家，而史記獨藏周室，以故滅。惜哉，惜哉！獨有秦記，又不載日月，其文略不具。²⁹⁷

After Qin had achieved its goal [of unification], it burned [copies of] the *Odes* and *Documents* under Heaven, and especially the historical records of the various rulers in particular, because they contain satires and ridicules of the [Qin]. The reason why the *Odes* and *Documents* have reappeared is that most of them were stored by private families, whereas the historical records were stored only by the House of Zhou, and therefore all were destroyed. How regrettable! How regrettable! The only historical records that have survived are those of Qin, and they did not record dates. Their texts are abbreviated and incomplete.

This paragraph explains Sima Qian's difficulty in reconstructing narratives for the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (476-221 B.C.E.). This is one of the reasons why the speed of this account is rather fast. The other one is, as I have mentioned in Chapter 1, is the general principle that sections on ancient times tend to be briefer than those dealing with recent times (*yuan lü jin xiang* 遠略近詳).²⁹⁸

To illustrate the uneven narrative speed of *Shi ji*, I will compare some parallels with several other historical writings. One example is the struggle for power between Lord Zhuang of Zheng 鄭莊公 (r. 743-701 B.C.E.) and his younger brother Duan, which is contained in all three important historical works: *Chun qiu*, *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ *SJ* 15, 684.

²⁹⁸ See 1.8 Narratives in the *Shi ji*, 83.

²⁹⁹ *CQ* Yin 1.3, 7. *ZZ* Yin 1.4, 10-16.

The *Zuo zhuan* and the *Shi ji* are clear about the relationships among the characters and about the main plot of this episode: Lord Zhuang was the oldest son of his father and his mother, Lady Wu, who was the primary wife. Lord Zhuang later became the heir.

However, Lady Wu Jiang liked the younger brother Duan more than Lord Zhuang.³⁰⁰

Therefore, she and Duan conspired to attack Lord Zhuang and enthrone Duan in his place.

The parallel section of story in *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji* begins with the installation of Lord Zhuang in 744 and ends when the younger brother, Duan, flees to Gong in the 22nd year of Lord Zhuang's reign (742 B.C.E.). In other words, the duration of the event is two years. In contrast, the duration of the narrative in the three works differs greatly. In *Chun qiu*, the entire story is summarized in one sentence "The Lord of Zheng overcame Duan at Yan" 鄭伯克段于鄆, whereas in the *Zuo zhuan*, this single sentence grows into 270 characters, introducing the various phases of the competition between Lord Zhuang and his younger brother, Duan. The *Shi ji* version of this story, longer than in the *Chun qiu* but much shorter than *Zuo zhuan*, presents it in eighty-nine characters translated below.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ According to ZZ, Wu Jiang did not like Lord Zhuang because he was *wusheng* 寤生 and she was scared. Scholars have different understandings of the meaning of this word. Du Yu 杜預 (222-285) glosses it as "Lord had already been born" see SSJZS (*Shishanijing zhushu*) 6, Yin 1, 2.15b. Ying Shao (fl. 189-94) explains that it refers to "babies who as soon as they are born can open their eyes and see," and such babies were considered inauspicious. In "The Hereditary House of Zheng," Sima Qian expounded that it means the birth was difficult. Shen Qianhan (1775-1831), in *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan buzhu*, argued that *wu* 寤 is probably a variant character for *wu* 𡗗, meaning the "opposite direction." Thus, *wusheng* means "breech birth," which is dangerous and very painful for the mother. I follow the last interpretation.

³⁰¹ The numbers of characters in ZZ and SJ do not include punctuations.

莊公元年，封弟段於京，號太叔。祭仲曰：「京大於國，非所以封庶也」。莊公曰：「武姜欲之，我弗敢奪也」段至京，繕治甲兵，與其母武姜謀襲鄭。二十二年，段果襲鄭，武姜為內應。莊公發兵伐段。段走，伐京，京人畔段，段出走鄆。鄆潰，段出奔共。

In the first [regnal] year of Lord Zhuang, [he] enfeoffed Duan in Jing and dubbed him “The Great Younger Brother.”

Zhai Zhong said, “Jing is larger than the capital. It is not right to give such a fief to one who was not [your father’s] heir.”

Lord Zhuang said, “Lady Wu wishes it. I do not dare to take [Jing] for myself.” When Duan arrived in Jing, he repaired and put in order armor and weapons. [He] and his mother, Lady Wu Jiang, schemed to attack Zheng. In the 22nd year, Duan attacked Zheng as expected. Lady Jiang was his accomplice within [the capital]. Lord Zhuang sent out an army to attack Duan. Duan fled. [Lord Zhuang] attacked Jing. The people of Jing turned against Duan. Duan [then] fled to Yan. Yan was vanquished, and Duan fled to Gong.

In these works, the speed of *Chun qiu* is the fastest, *Shi ji* is in the middle, and *Zuo zhuan* is the slowest. *Shi ji* does not include the dialogue between Lord Zhuang and his mother about enfeoffing Duan. Meanwhile, Sima reduces the exchanges in the *Zuo zhuan* between Lord Zhuang and his two ministers, Zhai Zhong and Lü, to the key point. In contrast to *Zhuo zhuan*, Duan’s rebellion and Lord Zhuang’s quelling of it is highly concise in *Shi ji*.

Of course, there are opposite examples in which the speed of *Shi ji* is slower than that of *Zuo zhuan*. In some cases, *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji* move at more or less the same speed. In sum, the faster the narrative speed is, the greater the ratio between the information and the story duration.

Genette further divides the speed of narrative into several types according to their degree. The two extremes are *ellipsis* and descriptive *pause*. The former refers to

occasions when narrative time is much shorter than the story time, whereas the latter refers to the opposite, when the narrative time is a great deal longer than the story time. Two intermediate points between ellipsis and pause are *scene* and *summary*. Genette calls the situation when the narrative time and story time are equal a “scene.” The narrator just presents the story without acceleration, nor slowdown, usually in the form of dialogue. Compared with the previous three types, summary is more flexible because its speed ranges between scene and ellipsis, depending on the degree to which the author condenses the story.

If we apply Genette’s four types of temporal relationship between the story time and narrative time to my exploration of *Chun qiu*, *Zuo zhuan*, and *Shi ji*, the narrative speed becomes increasingly uneven. Generally, the later the text was produced; the more uneven the narrative speed is. The speed of *Chun qiu*, in the form of annals, is mostly steady but fast because it requires just four to five entries to report the events in each year, normally divided into spring, summer, autumn, and winter, occasionally with terse additional information about a certain month. On average, it uses four to six sentences per year. Apparently, the reported events are highly selective and many historical events are omitted. In Genette’s terms, there are many ellipses in *Chun qiu* and most events are included events in the form of summaries.

Unlike *Chun qiu*, the narrative speed of *Zuo zhuan* varies from entry to entry. The extant form of *Zuo zhuan* was not originally composed as a commentary to *Chunqiu*, but

was reformatted as such perhaps by Du Yu (222-284), because he split it and appended it to the year-by-year entries of the *Chun qiu*.³⁰² Classical scholars have considered *Zuo zhuan* one of the commentaries on *Chun qiu*. *Zuo zhuan* expands large numbers of entries in *Chun qiu* into extensive narratives of various lengths, from several lines to numerous pages. Not every entry in the *Chun qiu* has a corresponding entry in the *Zuo zhuan*.³⁰³

Chun qiu comprises around 18,000 characters. In contrast, *Zuo zhuan* is about ten times as long as the *Chun qiu*, and also covers a period twenty-seven years longer. Normally, such expansions in *Zuo zhuan* are scenes, because a large proportion of narratives are conversations, whose narrative time equals story time, according to Genette. Generally, analyses of military or political circumstances (including banquets) are presented in scenes, whereas wars often get a quick summary sketch. One advantage of giving a great deal more space to analyses is that these scenes primarily contain substantial dialogues, serving either to edify the reader, or at times pushing the plot forward. As David Schaberg says, “accounts of diplomatic and military encounters frequently include passages of highly stylized speech.”³⁰⁴

Watson noted in the preface of his English translation of the Battle of Chengpu 城濮:

³⁰² Knechtges, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 2395.

³⁰³ For example, a twelve-character long entry in *Chun qiu* is expanded into several pages in the *Zuo zhuan*, explaining the rise the Chen lineage in the state of Qi. Other five entries in *Chun qiu* do not have a corresponding entry in *Zuo zhuan*. See ZZ Zhuang 22.1, 219-34.

³⁰⁴ Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 234.

As is often the case in the *Tso chuan*, the description of the battle itself is relatively brief, the greater part of the narrative being devoted to preparations, prognostications, the shifts and defections of allied states, the division of spoils, and the swearing of various *meng* or oaths of alliance that were intended to prevent future hostilities but somehow never did.³⁰⁵

This battle took place in 632 B.C.E. at Chengpu in the state of Wei. The powerful opponents were the southern state of Chu and the northern state of Jin. Three other small states, Wei, Song, and Cao, were also involved. The cause of this battle was the competition between Jin and Chu for influence over other contemporary states. In this example, descriptions of the preparation for the battle, filled with conversations of rulers, generals, ministers, are about eight times as long as the description of the battlefield itself. The Chief Minister of Chu, Zi Yu 子玉 (d. 632), was determined to fight Jin.³⁰⁶ However, his ruler, Lord Cheng of Chu, wanted to avoid warfare and tried to persuade Zixu to do likewise. Lord Cheng's words explained why he thought Chu should avoid a battle with Jin:

無從晉師，晉侯在外，十九年矣，而果得晉國，險阻艱難，備嘗之矣，民之情偽，盡知之矣，天假之年，而除其害，天之所置，其可廢乎，軍志曰，允當則歸，又曰，知難而退，又曰，有德不可敵，此三志者，晉之謂矣。³⁰⁷

Do not go after the Jin army! The marquis of Jin has been abroad for nineteen years, and has gained control of Jin as expected. [He] has tasted every kind of danger, obstruction, hardship, and difficulty. [He] has learned all about the true feelings and the deceptions of the people. Heaven has lent him years and has

³⁰⁵ Watson, *The Tso Chuan*, 50.

³⁰⁶ Zi Yu was a member of the imperial family and served as the prime minister from 637 until his death. He committed suicide after the defeat at Chengpu.

³⁰⁷ ZZ, Xi 28.3, 456.

removed calamities that he has faced. When Heaven has placed a man in such a position, is it possible to depose him? A military records says, “When pitted against an equal, retire.” It also says, “When one is aware of difficulties ahead, withdraw.” And it says, “The man of virtue cannot be opposed.” All three of these maxims apply to Jin.

Lord Cheng quoted from a military book to explain why Zi Yu should lead the Chu army in retreat. We may never know whether the ruler did in fact say this to persuade Zi Yu. He perhaps did not have to. The historian or editor of the *Zuo zhuan* may not have had the testimony of a witness to the scene. Of course, this paragraph prepares for the serious defeat of Zi Yu. If we removed it, the whole narrative would not be influenced. It is likely that the historian wrote the speech of Lord Cheng to teach readers the principle that a man of virtue can always achieve victory.

Another category of scene in the *Zuo zhuan* is the numerous descriptions of banquets on diplomatic occasions, where the author does not record exchanges word by word. In contrast, the context of a recitation and the characters’ reactions and comments to it are always presented in detail. Rulers and ministers of the states recite poems from *The Odes* in a diplomatic context in order to convey their own messages and meanings, rather than the original meanings of the poem. These narratives are meant for those who can connect the words with the historical circumstances and comprehend the meaning between the lines.³⁰⁸ Apparently, other narrative speeds, such as summary and ellipse, are

³⁰⁸ In *Poetry and Personality*, Van Zoeren discusses the recitation of *Odes* in the *Zuo zhuan*. He argues that the original meaning of the *Odes* does not limit the uses that could be made of it. They serve as

not good choices for this purpose. It may explain why banquets are usually represented by scenes, whose speed equals that of the story.

In 542 B.C.E., the Prince Wei of Chu, who also served as the Chief Minister, holds a banquet. He later assassinates his nephew and installs himself as Lord Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (r. 540-529 B.C.E.). The aim is to receive Zhao Meng 趙孟 (Zhao Wu, Zhao Wenzhi; d. 541 B.C.E.), who is accompanied by his colleague, Shu Xiang 叔向 (d. 528 B.C.E.).³⁰⁹ Zhao, a high minister in Jin, represents his state. In a first exchange of poems, the Chu prince recites the first stanza of “Great Brightness,” to which Zhao Meng responds with “Diminutive.”³¹⁰ Zhao Meng then tells Shu Xiang that, on the basis of the latter’s recitation, he realizes that Wei is going to take over the throne of the lord of Chu. While Wei’s selection does not specify the name of any Zhou King, and only emphasizes the dynasty’s brightness on earth and in Heaven, it ends with the fall of Shang. This implies that the mandate of Heaven is not constant, suggesting the prince’s ambition to usurp the throne himself. Zhao Meng recites “Diminutive” in order to warn Wei. The admonishing message in “Diminutive” is effective because it asserts that wise men are adept at restraining themselves instead of taking whatever Heaven makes available.³¹¹

a rhetoric or source of useful phrases to make a point. See 37-43. As for discussions, see Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 234 and Mao Zhenhua, “Bainian shuping,” 88.

³⁰⁹ *Lingyin* is the title of prime minister in Chu. Here it refers to the Chu prince, Wei 圍.

³¹⁰ ZZ, Zhao 1.3, 1207-08. “Great Brightness” is “Daming” (Mao 236). “Diminutive” is “Xiaoyuan” (Mao 196).

³¹¹ Yang Bojun cited Du Yu’s commentaries to Wei and Zhao Meng’s selections. Du Yu wrote that Wei used “明明在下，赫赫在上，” which describes the virtue of King Wen of Zhou, to express his

Zhao Meng's response and Shu Xiang's strong criticism of Prince Wei following the recitations inform readers that they both understand Wei's implicit message. By citing Shang's decline, Shu Xiang predicts that though Wei might rule successfully his rule would not last long because of his unrighteousness.³¹²

The variation in *Shi ji*'s narrative speed is much greater than in the *Chun qiu* or *Zuo zhuan*, which primarily follow a year-by-year pace. The narrative speed of *Shi ji* ranges from ellipses to summaries, to scenes. Ellipses, the fastest type of narrative, are very common in the *Shi ji*. "The Basic Annals of Qin" (Qin benji 秦本紀) skips the 6th year to the 8th year of Lord Mu's 秦穆公 (659-621 B.C.E.) reign.³¹³ In the *shijia* section and the *liezhuan* section, ellipses are even more frequent.

A typical example in the *shijia* section is "The Hereditary House of Zhao" (Zhao shijia 趙世家). At the beginning, it introduces the genealogy of the Zhao lineage, starting with its ancient ancestors, in just a few lines. Beginning with the attack on Huo led by Zhao Su 趙夙 in 661 B.C.E., the chapter proceeds with slightly more details, as its narrative speed slows down. Because of this victory, Zhao Su was enfeoffed in Geng, which became the base of the Zhao lineage. The careers of Zhao Su's grandson and great grandson, Zhao Cui 趙衰 (?-622 B.C.E.) and Zhao Dun 趙盾 (655-601 B.C.E.),

own greatness. As for Zhao Meng's recitation, Du Yu believed that his message was delivered through "各敬爾儀，天命不又。"

³¹² Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 234-37.

³¹³ *SJ* 5, 186-87.

respectively, receive dozens of sentences. The first scene tells the story known as “The Disaster at Xiagong” (*Xiagong zhi nan* 下宮之難), which the playwright, Ji Junxiang 紀君祥, in the thirteen century developed into a drama called *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi gu'er* 趙氏孤兒).³¹⁴ The Zhao lineage is almost eradicated because of conflicts between Zhao Dun and his political enemy Tu'an Gu 屠岸賈. The only member of the family who survives is the infant, Zhao Meng 趙孟 or Zhao Wu 趙武, the representative of Jin in the banquet scene I have discussed above.³¹⁵ Two great heroes who contributed to the baby's survival were followers of the Zhao clan, Gongsun Chujiu 公孫杵臼 and Cheng Ying 程嬰.

This scene in *Shi ji* presents the cause and process of Tu'an Gu's eradication of the Zhao lineage, how the orphan is hidden during several searches, and how Gongsun Chujiu and Cheng Ying save him. Because Zhao Meng's mother is the elder sister of Lord Cheng, she is not executed even though she was connected with Zhao lineage by marriage. The mother gives birth to a baby who later is known as the orphan, Zhao Meng. Tu'an hears the news and launches a search inside the palace. It is a matter of luck that he

³¹⁴ In 1753, Voltaire wrote a version of this story, titled *L'Orphelin de la Chine*. He thought his adopted play exemplifies Confucian morality. The drama's full name is *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of Zhao*. It is attributed to Ji, but we know very little about him. Since it is developed on the basis of narratives in *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*, anonymous scholars or playwrights might have been involved. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century China, many literati participated in writing dramas.

³¹⁵ Zhao Meng was the posthumous title. To avoid confusion, from here on I will refer to him as Zhao Meng, instead of Zhao Wu.

does not find the orphan, so Gongsun and Cheng work out a plan to protect the orphan in case Tu'an searches again.

Here is an excerpt from this scene:

公孫杵臼曰：「立孤與死孰難？」程嬰曰：「死易，立孤難耳。」公孫杵臼曰：「趙氏先君遇子厚，子彊為其難者，吾為其易者，請先死。」乃二人謀取他人嬰兒負之，衣以文葆，匿山中。程嬰出，謬謂諸將軍曰：「嬰不肖，不能立趙孤。誰能與我千金，吾告趙氏孤處。」諸將皆喜，許之，發師隨程嬰攻公孫杵臼。杵臼謬曰：「小人哉程嬰！昔下宮之難不能死，與我謀匿趙氏孤兒，今又賣我。縱不能立，而忍賣之乎！」抱兒呼曰：「天乎天乎！趙氏孤兒何罪？請活之，獨殺杵臼可也。」諸將不許，遂殺杵臼與孤兒。諸將以為趙氏孤兒良已死，皆喜。然趙氏真孤乃反在，程嬰卒與俱匿山中。³¹⁶

Gongsun Chujiu said, "To install the orphan or to die—which is more difficult?"

Cheng Ying said, "To die is easy; to install the orphan is difficult."

Gongsun said, "The Zhao forefathers treated you generously. You forcefully do what is difficult and I will do what is easy. Let me die before you."

Thereupon, they planned to take a baby from another family, and carried him on their back. They wrapped him inside a patterned swaddling cloth and hid him in the mountains. Cheng left [the mountain] and lied to the generals, "I am not worthy. I cannot install the orphan. I will tell where the orphan of Zhao is to whoever pays me thousands coins." All the generals were pleased, assented, and sent troops to follow Cheng to attack Gongsun.

Chujiu lied, "Cheng Ying, what a villain you are! Previously, you were unwilling to die in the debacle of the palace, and schemed with me to hide the orphan. Now you have sold me out? Even if you were unable to install him, how can you bear to sell me out?"

[Cheng] picked up the baby and shouted, "Heaven! Heaven! For what reason is the orphan of Zhao punished? Please let him live. It will be enough to kill only Chujiu." The generals did not agree. [They] killed both Gongsun and the orphan. The generals, thinking that the orphan of Zhao was really dead, were pleased. However, the real orphan on the contrary was alive. Cheng Ying finally went into hiding in the mountains with the orphan.

³¹⁶ *SJ* 43. 1784.

This scene presents characters' dialogues, actions, and interactions in detail. As compared with the previous genealogy of Zhao, the speed slows down because the author has a large amount of information to offer to the reader. After Cheng Ying had taken care of the orphan for fifteen years, Lord Jing of Jin 晉景公 (r. 599-581) recognized the orphan and enfeoffed him in an area as his own territory. Five years later, when the orphan turned twenty, Cheng committed suicide to report to the souls of Gongsun Chujiu and Zhao Dun. Then the narrative quickly speeds up again, skipping several dozen years until it comes to the grandson of the orphan, Zhao Yang 趙殃, otherwise known as Viscount Jian of Zhao 趙簡子. The variation of narrative speed in this chapter shows that that the heroic actions of Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu are evidently important in the *Shi ji*, which emphasizes or deemphasizes an event by adjusting the narrative speed.

Similarly, in the biographical section, each biography consists of ellipses, summaries, and several episodes in detail, to present the protagonist's life within a limited space. "The Biography of General Li" ("Li jiangjun liezhuan" 李將軍列傳) begins in 166. B.C.E., when Li Guang 李廣 had just started his career in the army, and ends with his death in 119. These forty-seven years are presented in the form of ellipses, summaries, and five detailed scenes.³¹⁷ The reader follows the narration by certain chronological markers, such as "in the fourteenth year of Emperor Wen's reign" (*Wendi*

³¹⁷ See Allen, "An Introductory Study," 49. 1) battle on the frontier, killing the eagle archers; 2) Captured by Xiongnu, but escapes, is punished; 3) Meets drunken gatekeeper, is detained; 4) Conversation with diviner; 5) His troops lose their way, inquiry held, Li commits suicide.

shisi nian 文帝十四年), “shortly after Emperor Jing was installed” (*ji Xiaojing chuli* 及孝景初立), and many others. Joseph Roe Allen III has counted ten episodes in this chapter, but only five of them are scenes by Genette’s definition. The narrative speeds of the ten episodes vary.

In the respect of narrative speed, *Shi ji* goes further than its predecessors with respect to narrative speed for several reasons. First, *Shi ji* covers a much longer period than the *Chun qiu* and *Zuo zhuan*. The *Chun qiu* covers the period between 722-481 B.C.E. *Zuo zhuan* covers a slightly longer period from 722 to 478 B.C.E. Since *Shi ji* offers much more information, it would be almost impossible to narrate at a constant speed throughout the work. The second reason is that the very form of *Shi ji* contributes to the uneven narrative speed of *Shi ji*. It is the first Chinese historical writing to include biographies. This new genre reinforces the varied narrative speed of *Shi ji*, because each chapter has to present the entire life of one or more protagonists within a limited space. Some chapters in the basic annals and the entire hereditary house section are of a similar genre. Except for the treatises and tables, most chapters contain scenes, which are the slowest in speed, so that other parts of a story have to be narrated more quickly.

This uneven speed of *Shi ji* extends from the narrative chapters to the tables. As their titles suggest, there are *shibiao* 世表 (genealogical tables), *nianbiao* 年表 (chronological tables), and *yuebiao* 月表 (monthly tables). Like narratives, they cut time into smaller units than a year. Since these tables do not narrate, but report, we may refer

to their speed as “reporting speed.” Monthly tables are slower than the chronological tables. The interval is shorter but the density of information is higher. One table may have many spaces filled with brief a statement of event(s), whereas others are filled with numbers, indicating the year of a reign. Blank spaces may indicate that in this year there were no events worth recording. For readers, the tables not only trace significant events pertaining to the same state, family, house, or historical personage at different times in a convenient, vertical layout, but also allow horizontal comparisons with the circumstances in other columns.³¹⁸

Sima Qian’s manipulation of narrative speed directly influences the reader’s access to the past. As I discussed in previous chapters, *Shi ji* is an ambitious and complicated work rather than a collection cut-and-pasted from earlier sources. Following the pace of *Shi ji*, readers pay more attention to some events and skip others.

4.2 Mood

The definition of mood in the Littré dictionary³¹⁹ reads:

name given to the different forms of the verb that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express ... the different points of view from which the life or the action is looked at.” Like the degrees suggested by verbs, “narrative

³¹⁸ If the tables are so useful to readers, I suspect that Sima Qian may have completed these tables prior to other genres and used them to structure his writing of the non-table chapters, narrative chapters in particular. For example, the month-to-month table of the Qin-Chu transition would be of great help for writing the basic annals on Xiang Yu and Gaozu.

³¹⁹ It’s a French language dictionary. Littré, Emile. *Dictionnaire de la langue française*. Vol. 4. Hachette, 1885.

‘representation,’ or more exactly, narrative information, has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, in a more or less direct way, and can thus (to adopt a common and convenient spatial metaphor, which is not to be taken literally) to keep a greater or lesser distance from what it tells.³²⁰

This degree of directness is the *distance* from the subject of the narrative.

Meanwhile, the information of a story is affected by the perspective from which it is told.

Distance and perspective are two aspects of mood, two modalities to regulate narrative information. This section will analyze the mood of *Shi ji* in these two respects.

4.2.1 Distance

Genette’s discussion of distance has two aspects: the degree of directness and the amount of information offered in narration.³²¹ The more directly the narrative proceeds, the shorter the narrative distance is. Indeed, Plato first addressed the issue of distance by contrasting two opposite extremes that he defined as pure narrative and imitation in Book III of *The Republic*.³²² According to Plato, pure narrative is the extreme of long distance because all the information is indirect and filtered, whereas imitation, also known as mimesis, represents the other extreme with the shortest distance because all the information is presented directly to readers with details. This contrast between pure narrative and mimesis is also known as *telling* versus *showing*. To illustrate this contrast,

³²⁰ As quoted in Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 162.

³²¹ Ibid, 166.

³²² Plato. *The Republic of Plato* (Book III), trans. Alexander Kerr. Chicago: CH Kerr & Co, 392-93.

I will use Genette's own example, comparing the Homer's writings and the corresponding rewritings by Plato. Homer wrote:

So said he, and the old man was afraid and obeyed his word, and fared silently along the shore of the loud-sounding sea. Then went that aged man apart and prayed aloud to king Apollo, whom Leto of the fair locks bare.³²³

Here it is in Plato's rewriting:

And the old man on hearing this was frightened and departed in silence, and having gone apart from the camp he prayed at length to Apollo.

Comparing these quotations, Genette points out that the two salient features of Plato's rewriting are indirection and condensation. Therefore, Plato's rewriting is more distant. However, in Plato's example, the amount of information and the directness of narration are intertwined. In addition, as Genette points out, pure narration which contains many details (large amount of information), can be mimetic as well.³²⁴

As for the narrative of speeches, the more intrusive the narrator is, the longer distance the narrative speech has.³²⁵ For example, when Xiang Liang and Xiang Yu (also known as Xiang Ji) were at the beginning of their rise to power, they obtained their first army by murdering the governor of Kuaiji 會稽. Xiang Liang was talking to the governor of Kuaiji about responding to the revolt of Chen She 陳涉 (?-208 B.C.E.) against the Qin

³²³ Translated by Walter Leaf. See Lang, Leaf, Myers, *Iliad* I, ll.33-36.

³²⁴ Ibid, 169.

³²⁵ Ibid, 162-175.

government.³²⁶ Their meeting happened indoor while Xiang Yu was standing outside. In the five sentences below, *Shi ji* uses speeches of various degrees of directness to tell the reader how Xiang Liang and Xiang Yu killed the governor.³²⁷

(1) 梁乃出，誠籍持劍居外待。

Liang thereafter exited to warn Xiang Ji to hold his sword [in readiness] and wait outside.

(2) 梁復入，與守坐，曰：「請召籍，使受命召桓楚。」

Liang entered again, sat down with the governor, and said, "I beg to call in Xiang Ji, and let him receive your order to summon Huan Chu."

(3) 守曰：「諾。」梁召籍入。

The governor said, "Yes." Liang [then] called Xiang Ji to come in.

(4) 須臾，梁眴籍曰：「可行矣！」於是籍遂拔劍斬守頭。

After a while, Xiang Liang winked at Xiang Ji and said, "[You] may proceed!" At that moment, Xiang Ji drew his sword and cut off the governor's head.

.....

(5) 梁乃召故所知豪吏，諭以所為起大事，遂舉吳中。

Liang then summoned the wealthy people and officials whom he had known previously and informed them of his reasons for starting a revolt. Then [he] rebelled in the region of Wu.

Each of the five sentences contains a speech, and they can be put into two categories. Sentence (1) and (5) belong to category one; the rest forms category two. A comparison of the two categories shows that their difference lies in the way that the speech is given to the reader. The distance of category one is longer than that of category

³²⁶ Chen She (Chen Sheng) was the leader of the first rebellion, known as Dazexiang uprising, against the Qin Dynasty during the reign of the Second Emperor (210-207 B.C.E.) in 208 B.C.E. Following Chen She, various powers rebelled in many places in the empire. Xiang Liang and Xiang Yu are one of them, representing the nobles of Chu.

³²⁷ All the speeches below locate in *SJ* 7. 297.

two because the narrator summarized the speech. In contrast, category two is direct quotation without obvious mediation by the narrator, making characters' speeches appear more mimetic.³²⁸ Thus, we find two implications: the more quantity of information the narrative offers, the stronger its mimetic effects are; and the presence of the narrator and the mimetic effects are in an inverse ratio.

This does not mean that a work with heavy intrusions of a narrator could not be mimetic at all in any respect. For non-verbal events, the narrator can offer a large amount of information in his or her descriptions. In "The Biography of General Li (i.e. Li Guang 李廣)," *Shi ji* describes Li Guang's escape from Xiongnu 匈奴 in great details:

胡騎得廣，廣時傷病，置廣兩馬間，絡而盛臥廣。行十餘里，廣詳死，睨其旁有一胡兒騎善馬，廣暫騰而上胡兒馬，因推墮兒，取其弓，鞭馬南馳數十里，復得其餘軍，因引而入塞。³²⁹

The barbarian horsemen captured Li Guang. Li Guang at that time was wounded. [Therefore, the horsemen] put Li Guang between two horses, stringing a hammock for Li Guang to rest in. After they had preceded more than ten *li*, Li Guang pretended to be dead. [He] peered around and saw a young Xiongnu boy mounted on a fine horse just beside him. Li Guang suddenly leapt out of the hammock and onto the boy's horse. Pushing the boy off, he seized his bow. He whipped the horse and galloped dozens of *li* southwards. [There, Li Guang] joined the remnants of his army, leading it into a camp.

³²⁸ The most mimetic ones are those where the narrator pretends literally to give the floor to his character. See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 172. These speeches are presented to the reader without the intermediate narrator. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, one feature of *Shi ji* is that it never lets any of its characters *be* the narrator. The narrator, on the first level of narrative at least, is always the Grand Historian. The most mimetic style never appears in this book.

³²⁹ *SJ* 109. 2870-71.

This episode includes a series of actions by Li Guang: his capture, his secret observation of his environment, and his abrupt and successful escape. Of course, this episode does not “tell itself.” Readers learn all the information through the narrator; however, the large quantity of information provided by the narrator has strong mimetic characteristics.

Every text is a combination of diverse degrees of telling interwoven with showing, as my comparison between *Shi ji* and other historical writings in the next section will demonstrate. Comparisons of distances will shed light on the emphasis of *Shi ji*.

4.2.2 Comparison of the Distance of *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji* and *Han shu*

Before standardizing the structure of history, as seen in *zhengshi* (“regular histories,” i.e. dynastic histories), historical works were organized in many different ways. Distance is an important issue if we look at it from two perspectives: one is that the historian directly regulates the amount of information that the reader should know; the other is that the reader’s understanding and interpretations of the text depend entirely on the information provided by the historian. This section, limited to four significant works in early China, namely *Chun qiu*, *Zuo zhuan*, *Shi ji*, and *Han shu*, explores their differences in narrative distance, which are largely decided by the quantity of information offered in a narrative. It will shed light on both what they emphasize and their overall

functions. My comparisons show that *Shi ji* has the shortest distance and the strongest mimetic effects.

The distance of *Chun qiu* is the greatest. The narrator simply lists several events in each year, with a minimum of information. There are no speeches, direct or indirect. *Chun qiu* is a terse and dry record, which readers have trouble understanding without help from commentaries.

The narrative distance of *Zuo zhuan* is much shorter than *Chun qiu*. Transmitted as a commentary on the *Chun qiu*, the *Zuo zhuan* contains well-organized narratives corresponding to the extremely succinct annals. It adds a large amount of information about the genesis of an event, its development, and even presents characters' speeches, as seen in the previous example about Lord Zhuang of Zheng and his brother Duan.³³⁰ Descriptions of characters' actions and speeches, because of their moral significance, receive particular attention. A righteous, or iniquitous, or sometimes improper, action typically brings positive or negative consequences, as the narrative moves on.³³¹

Although *Zuo zhuan*'s and *Shi ji*'s distances are both closer than *Chun qiu*, they still differ. As shown in the previous discussion of narrative speed, one remarkable difference is that *Zuo zhuan* keeps a relatively stable narrative speed because of its arrangement within a year-by-year framework. *Shi ji*, in contrast, varies in speed and

³³⁰ See 4.1 Duration and Its Types, 191.

³³¹ Li Wai-ye examines the reading of signs and how causality is established in *Zuo zhuan*. As Li points out, views of order in the *Zuo zhuan* are often based on morality and ritual propriety. See *The Readability of the Past*, 86-171. Schaberg also discusses this subject in *A Patterned Past*, 96-124; 191-221.

distance. The effects of changing distance are reinforced by the beginning-to-ending feature of *Shi ji*. Its narrative sections, whether basic annals, hereditary houses, or biographies, supposedly present the subject's entire evolution, from rise to collapse or death.

The large amount of information offered in the *Shi ji* raises two issues: first it is a strongly mimetic feature, which explains why many readers find *Shi ji* more interesting than *Han shu*; more importantly is that where exactly the distance becomes shorter is a significant question, because it helps to understand to understand what questions *Shi ji* can answer. In other words, short distance indicates where the attention of *Shi ji* locates. It sheds light on the function that *Shi ji* can serve.

4.2.2.1 How vs. What: Example of the Tian clan in Qi

The *Shi ji* is not only is strongly mimetic, but also gives more attention to causes of events and historical processes introduced step by step. In this respect, it differs from the three earlier historical works. The distance of *Han shu* is not as close as that of *Shi ji* in many chapters, because the former sometimes altered the latter's text either by turning it into a summary or into the pure narration that Sima Qian presents in scenes.

In “The Tian Jingzhong Wan shijia” (田敬仲完世家 The Hereditary House of Tian Jingzhong Wan)³³², *Shi ji* begins with Chen Wan 陳完’s (b.706 B.C.E.?) fleeing to Qi from the disorder in his native Chen. Chen Wan was the son of Lord Li of Chen 陳厲公 (?- 700 B.C.E.). After his arrival in Qi, he changed his surname to Tian. To avoid confusion, this chapter uses Tian as the surname of all his descendants. The *shijia* chapter covers sixteen generations of the Tian lineage, which gradually took control of Qi and displaced the Jiang lineage³³³ as rulers of Qi ruling until the unification of the Qin in 221 B.C.E.

Among Chen Wan’s descendants, Sima Qian gives much space and attention to Tian Qi 田乞 (or Tian Xizi 田釐子 Master of Tian Xi;? -485 B.C.E.) and Tian Chang 田常 (Tian Chengzi 田成子 Master of Tian Cheng fl. 5th century B.C.E.). They largely built the foundation for the Tian lineage’s power and influence in the Qi court, a big step towards taking the throne from the Jiang lineage. This chapter proceeds chronologically. After introducing Chen Wan, the narrator quickly surveys the genealogy of the Tian lineage. Tian Qi’s father was favored by Lord Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547-490 B.C.E.), marking the starting-point of the rise of Tian. The distance becomes much closer when

³³² *SJ* 46. 1879-1904.

³³³ The Jiang lineage were the descendants of Jiang Taigong 姜太公. He made great contributions to conquering the Shang. Thereafter, King Wu of Zhou enfeoffed Qi him in Qi.

the author reaches the fifth generation, Tian Qi. He was just a minister serving Lord Jing before he carried out a series of actions to achieve his political ambition.

According to *Shi ji*, Tian Qi was the first member of the Tian lineage who served as a senior official at the court.³³⁴ He eventually becomes the Prime minister of Qi, and held exclusive power by taking two significant steps. The first was to win over the commoners' support by playing tricks with the grain measures: when people paid for their taxes in grain, he collected it in smaller containers than the standard; and when lending grain from the state to the people, he used bigger containers. In this way, the Tian lineage won the favor and support of the people in Qi. *Shi ji* marks the end of this part with the statement "the great families [in Qi] became even stronger and people thought much of the Tian lineage."

The second step was riskier but highly rewarding: installing a new ruler. Lord Jing's designated, his son, Tu, to succeed him. However, since Tian Qi got along well with another son, Yangsheng 陽生, he installed him as Lord Dao of Qi 齊悼公 (r. 488-485 B.C.E.).³³⁵ The coronation of a new ruler paid him back significantly and immediately. From then on, Tian Qi held exclusive power in Qi for four years until he died in 485 B.C.E. It is worth noting that *Shi ji* ends each step taken by the Tian Qi with

³³⁴ Chen Wan once served as a Gongzheng 工正, a position which administers all kinds of technicians. Tian Qi's father and grandfather both worked for Lord Zhuang of Qi without mentioning their positions. The father was favored by Lord Zhuang because of his strength. See *SJ* 46. 1881.

³³⁵ Before Tian Qi installed Yang Sheng, he first made chaos among great ministers. This chaos was too serious that Tu and his followers' troops were defeated. Therefore, Tu fled to Lu. After installing the new ruler, Tian Qi assassinated Tu.

his comments, informing the reader their significance and consequences (underlined below).

Step 1:

田釐子乞事齊景公為大夫，其收賦稅於民以小斗受之，其（粟）〔稟〕予民以大斗，行陰德於民，而景公弗禁。由此田氏得齊眾心，宗族益彊，民思田氏。³³⁶

Tian Xizi (Tian Qi) served Lord Jing of Qi as a grandee. When he collected tax from the people, he would use small pecks to receive it, [but] he distributed [grain] to people using large pecks. He secretly benefited the people, but Lord Jing did not forbid it. From then on, the Tian lineage got the people's support. Clans in [Qi] became stronger and people inclined to the Tian lineage.

Step 2:

……遂立陽生於田乞之家，是為悼公。乃使人遷晏孺子於駘，而殺孺子荼。悼公既立，田乞為相，專齊政。³³⁷

… therefore, [ministers] Yang Sheng was installed [as the new ruler,] at Tian Qi's house. This was Lord Dao. [Tian Qi] then sent someone to move Yan Ruzi [the legitimate ruler] to Tai and killed the mother of Ruzi. After Lord Dao was installed, Tian Qi became the Prime Minister and held exclusive power in Qi.

The narrative proceeds that Tian Qi's son, Chang, continued on this path. It took Tian Chang four steps to attain more territory than his ruler. He first repeated the two steps his father had taken, and then pushed his power to a still higher level. In all the descriptions of Tian Chang's rise, we find the same pattern of narration that Sima has used in Steps 1 and 2: an event followed by its effects or its significance.

Step 3:

³³⁶ *SJ* 46. 1881.

³³⁷ *Ibid.* 1882.

……四年，田乞卒，子常代立，是為田成子。田常成子與監止俱為左右相，相簡公。田常心害監止，監止幸於簡公，權弗能去。於是田常復修釐子之政，以大斗出貸，以小斗收。齊人歌之曰：「姬乎采芑，歸乎田成子！」³³⁸

In the fourth year, Tian Qi died. His son, Chang, replaced him and was installed. This was Viscount Cheng of Tian. Tian Chang and Jian Zhi served together as Left Prime Minister and Right Prime Minister. Tian Chang was jealous of Jian Zhi in heart. [Since Jian Zhi was favored by Lord Jian, his power could not be dismissed. At that time, [Tian Chang] once again practiced administration by Viscount Li of Tian. [He] used big pecks to lend [grain] and used small pecks to collect [taxes]. The Qi people sang: “The vegetables gathered by women all come to Tian Chengzi.”

Step 4:

……田氏之徒恐簡公復立而誅己，遂殺簡公。簡公立四年而殺。於是田常立簡公弟驁，是為平公。平公即位，田常為相。³³⁹

… Members of the Tian lineage were worried that Lord Jian would be restored and would kill them. Therefore, [they] assassinated Lord Jian. After Lord Jian had been enthroned for four years, [he] was assassinated. Thereafter, Tian Chang installed the younger brother of Lord Jian, Ao, as Lord Ping. After Lord Ping ascended the throne, Tian Chang became Prime Minister.

Step 5:

……田常言於齊平公曰：「德施，人之所欲；君其行之。刑罰，人之所惡；臣請行之。」行之五年，齊國之政皆歸田常。³⁴⁰

Tian Chang spoke to Lord Ping, “Virtue and giving, are what people desire; My Lord, may you carry them out. Punishments and penalties are what people dislike; I, your minister, beg to carry them out.” When he had carried out [this principle] for five years, all responsibility for governance in Qi had come to reside with Tian Chang.

³³⁸ SJ 46. 1883. Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 doubted the reliability of the song. He argued that it was impossible that people were using the posthumous name of Tian Chang, namely Chengzi, to refer to him when he was alive. See *Shi tong* 12, v.3. Beijing: Zhonghua, 165.

³³⁹ SJ 46. 1884.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Step 6:

田常於是盡誅鮑、晏、監止及公族之彊者，而割齊自安平以東至瑯邪，自為封邑。封邑大於平公之所食。

Tian Chang, thereupon, entirely killed off all the powerful members of the clans of Bao, Yan, Jian Zhi, and the ruling clan. [He] also cut off the territory from the east of Anping to Langya of Qi, to be his own fief. His enfeoffment was bigger than the estate from which Lord Ping received his revenue.

From being one of two prime ministers to being the official who held exclusive held the power in Qi, from having no property to awarding himself an enfeoffment even larger than Lord Ping's estate—in four steps, Tian Chang eradicated and defeated all his competitors, potential enemies, and other strong clans. Each step ends with a summary of the change it makes as well as its significance. This pattern presents the Tian's usurpation clearly in a linear logic. From here on *Shi ji* lengthens the distance again, using only a few lines to inform the reader that, after two generations, the head of the Tian lineage was officially recognized by the Zhou court as the Marquis of Qi. The changing distance, from long to short and from short to long again, highlights the importance of the actions taken by Tian Qi and Tian Chang. The details, viewed from a closer distance, show *how* the Tian lineage achieved their ambition, in addition to *why* it happened.

The earlier *Zuo zhuan* presented the actions of the Tian lineage in a remarkably different way. It contains some records pertaining to the Tian lineage, including both actions and speeches of Chen Wan, Tian Xuwu 田須無 (文子), and comments by others,

such as Yan Ying 晏嬰.³⁴¹ However, as compared with *Shi ji*, the entries of *Zuo zhuan* focus on single events rather than sketching their overall impact.

One example Yan Ying's comment on Tian's measures criticized and the economic policies of Qi. While *Shi ji* emphasizes the result of this action, *Zuo zhuan* uses the same event to form a contrast between the administration of Lord Jing and that of the Tian lineage, explaining *why* the Tian was able to replace the Jiang family to rule Qi. The speech by Master Yan conveys the inevitability of the Tian lineage's usurpation. This excerpt in the *Zuo zhuan* reads:

叔向曰，齊其何如，晏子曰，此季世也，吾弗知，齊其為陳氏矣，公棄其民，而歸於陳氏，齊舊四量，豆，區，釜，鍾，四升為豆，各自其四，以登於釜，釜十則鍾，陳氏三量，皆登一焉，鍾乃大矣，以家量貸，而以公量收之，山木如市，弗加於山，魚鹽蜃蛤，弗加於海，民參其力，二入於公，而衣食其一，公聚朽蠹，而三老凍餒，國之諸市，屢賤踊貴，民人痛疾，而或燠休之，其愛之如父母，而歸之如流水，欲無獲民，將焉辟之，³⁴²

Shu Xiang said, "How are [the state affairs] in Qi?"

Master Yan said, "This is its final generation. I do not know. Qi will go to the Chen lineage [i.e. Tian]. The lord discarded his people and they are turning to the Chen lineage. Qi's old four measures are, the *dou*, the *qu*, the *fu*, and the *zhong*. Four *sheng* make a *dou*, and [each is four of the preceding measure] up to the *fu*; and ten *fu* make a *zhong*. The Chen lineage makes each of the [first] three measures once again greater, so that the *zhong* is even greater. They lend according to the personal measures, but collect according to the public measures. For wood in the markets, they charged the same price as when it is on their hills, not adding to the value of the wood on the hills. For seafood and salt from the sea

³⁴¹ Entries pertaining to Viscount Huan of Tian (referred to as Chen Huanzi in *Zuo zhuan*) are: Zhuang 22; Xiang 29; Zhao 3, 5, 8, 10. Entries relate to Tian Wenzhi (referred to as Chen Wenzhi) are: ZZ Xiang 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28. Comments from Yanzi is in Zhao 3.

³⁴² ZZ, Zhao 3.3, 1234-36.

they do not increase [the price].³⁴³ If you [divide] the people's labor into three parts, two parts go to the state and [only] one is [left] for food and clothing. What the state collects rots and is eaten by insects, while the *sanlao* freeze and starve.³⁴⁴ In all the markets of the state, [ordinary] shoes are cheap, while those for criminals whose toes have been cut off are expensive.³⁴⁵ The common people suffer it bitterly. In contrast, there is someone who is warm-hearted and generous to them. He loves them like a parent, and they go to him as like a flowing stream. If [the ruler] wished for [this person] not to win [support] of the people, how would he avoid it?"

The trick of using smaller pecks are described both in the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*; however, their narrative functions are different. The *Zuo zhuan* considers it an independent event that reflects the difference between the administration of Lord Jing and that of the Tian lineage. *Shi ji* views this event as part of a larger picture, connecting it with previous and following events. This is how it explains the Tian lineage's *how* usurpation of the ruling lineage Jiang took place. The readers understand the significance of each step and the linkage among several events in this theme. In this way, the *Shi ji* presents *how* the historical events happened. In contrast, Master Yan's speech merely compared the administration of the Chen lineage and Lord Jing. By listing the remarkable differences, Yan primarily explains *why* the former won the people's support.

³⁴³ Yang Bojun summarizes previous scholars' inference that the Tian lineage had slaves to work. Their labor was not added into the final rice of items. This was a way to win the people's support.

³⁴⁴ There are different explanations. Du Yu interprets it as three types of seniors whose ages are above eighty. Yang includes several readings the word in ZZ, 1235.

³⁴⁵ According to Yang Bojun's commentary, it implies that there were many criminals who were physically punished. See ZZ, 1236.

4.2.2.2 *How vs. What: The Example of the Empress Dowager Lü*

While *Han shu* inherits many aspects of *Shi ji* and sometimes even copies passages word for word³⁴⁶, *Shi ji*'s feature of emphasizing small changes is not inherited by the *Han shu*. Three reasons may account for this: first, *Han shu* deletes many details in the *Shi ji*; second, *Han shu* presents much detailed information through documents, such as edicts and summaries instead of the author's presentation of episodes. The authenticity of these documents may not be certain because they might have been silently altered; third, even where it does not delete text, *Han shu* reorganizes many segments within one chapter in the *Shi ji* by cutting and pasting among several chapters, obscuring the crucial interconnections among ostensibly major and minor events. I will illustrate these phenomena through a comparison between "The Basic Annals of Empress Dowager Lü" in the *Shi ji* and "The Basic Annals of Empress of Gaozu" 高后傳 in *Han shu*.³⁴⁷

The Empress Dowager (Lü Zhi 呂雉, 241-180 B.C.E.) was the primary wife of Emperor Gaozu (Liu Bang 劉邦, r. 202-195). They were married when Liu Bang was still a village head in County Pei. After Liu Bang became the first emperor of the Han

³⁴⁶ To the opposite, some scholars argue that some chapters in the extant *Shi ji* were actually copied from the *Han shu*. Early modern scholar, Cui Shi 崔適 (1852-1924), is an influential one. He questioned in his work, *Shi ji tan yuan* 史記探源 (Probing the Sources of *Shi ji*), 220. Other scholars include Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and Li Kuiyao 李奎耀. For a full discussion, see Lu Zongli, "Problem Concerning the Authenticity of *Shih chih* 123 revisited," 53.

³⁴⁷ See *SJ* 9, 395-412; Narratives about Empress Dowager Lü distributed in *HS* 3 高后傳, 95-104; *HS* 38 高五王傳, 1987-2002, *HS* 97 外戚傳, 3933-72. For analysis of the Lü and Liu families' status and competition, see Van Ess, "Praise and Slanders," 2006.

Dynasty in 202 B.C.E., he appointed Lü as his empress and Lü's son, Liu Ying 劉盈, as the Crown Prince. Ying later became Emperor Xiaohui (r. 195-188). Therefore, *Shi ji* and *Han shu* refer to Lü either as *Lü hou* 呂后, *Gao hou* 高后 (Empress Lü of Gaozu), or as the *Lü taihou* 呂太后 Empress Dowager Lü after she became a widow. During the seven-year reign of Emperor Xiaohui (195-188 B.C.E.), Lü made policy decisions informally and the emperor performed the rituals. In 188 B.C.E., Liu Gong 劉恭 (r. 188-184) Lü's grandson and the eleven-year old son of Emperor Xiaohui, ascended the throne. From then on, Empress Dowager Lü “officially administered” (*chengzhi* 稱制) the empire. In 184 B.C.E., Lü removed Liu Gong and appointed another son of Liu Ying, Liu Hong 劉弘 (r. 184-180 B.C.E.) as the next emperor.³⁴⁸ As soon as the Empress Dowager Lü died in the seventh year in 180 B.C.E., her ministers forced Liu Hong to abdicate. After a fight of about two months between the Lü family and the Liu family and their followers, Emperor Xiaowen, another son of Liu Bang, succeeded to the throne in 180 B.C.E.

The first remarkable difference between *Shi ji* and *Han shu* is where they begin. Although some events were mentioned in the Chapter 3, above, it is necessary here to discuss the background of this powerful and tough woman from the *beginning* of her

³⁴⁸ Liu Hong's original name was Liu Yi 劉義 and he was the former Prince of Changshan. As soon as he ascended the throne, he changed his name into Liu Hong. Normally, when a new emperor starts his rule, the calendar will restart its count the first year. This practice is known as *gaiyuan* 改元. Although he was a new emperor, he did not begin a new reign period, because the Empress Dowager Lü was still in charge. The first year of Liu Yi's reign was still officially the 5th year. See *SJ* 9, 403.

basic annals. There *Shi ji* prepares his readers and paves the way for the long political infighting that filled this woman's life. *Shi ji* begins with "The Empress Dowager Lü was the consort of Gaozu when he was still humble." 呂太后者，高祖微時妃也， whereas the *Han shu* writes, "The empress of Gaozu, whose last name is Lü, gave birth to Emperor Hui" 高皇后呂氏，生惠帝. As we shall see, this difference is highly significant.

Next, *Shi ji* introduces the fierce competition between Liu Ying and Liu Ruyi for the status of Crown Prince, which lasted for years. It was actually a struggle between their mothers, Empress Lü and Lady Qi.³⁴⁹ Following a summary of the Lü family's contribution to Liu Bang's rise are full details of Lü's continuous attacks on her political enemies, including Lady Qi, and imperial kinsmen who were feudal princes (*wang* 王) during the reigns of Liu Ying, Liu Gong, and Liu Yi. *Shi ji* presents Lü's entire life, from her husband's humble beginnings through her control of the Han Empire until her death.

In contrast, after a brief overview of the imperial genealogy, *Han shu* starts from 188 B.C.E., the first year of Liu Gong's reign, when the Empress Dowager started her regency. This time is decades later than the point where *Shi ji* begins the story. The result is the loss of much information that is necessary for an understanding of the relationship

³⁴⁹ The competition was between Liu Ying and his younger brother, Liu Ruyi, the son of Lady Qi. See 3.3.1 Chronological Order, 152. The successful appointment of Liu Ying as the Crown Prince largely contributed to the efforts of Empress Dowager Lü, who used his connections with ministers to influence Liu Bang's decisions.

between the Liu and Lü families. Because *Han shu* just simply identifies her as the mother of Emperor Xiaohui, readers would have no knowledge of her cunning. Many of the descriptions in the *Shi ji* are hints as to the true persona of the Empress Dowager.

In *Shi ji*, the rise of Empress Lü and her family is presented as a highly complicated process with several stages. While the distance of each stage varies, skipping any of them would break the connections in the logical chain. **Stage 1** is from the humble beginnings of Liu Bang to his death in 195 B.C.E., when Lü's status grew through furious competition and her brothers' efforts in the battlefield.³⁵⁰ The distance of Stage 1 is not the closest, however, including this preliminary stage demonstrates the complexity of the sources of her power. Some of her influence at court had begun long before she became the Empress Dowager. Her participation in the political realm after Liu Bang founded the Han Empire also explains her influence at the court. Additionally, some of her power indirectly came from her status as the mother of Emperor Xiaohui as well as from Emperor Xiaohui himself: he was weak and even refused to rule the empire, leaving the government to his mother.

Stage 2: With the death of Liu Bang in 195 B.C.E. and enthronement of her son, Emperor Xiaohui, Empress Dowager Lü took another step forward. At this stage, the distance is closer, as the *Shi ji* narrates an event in the first two years. It is concerned with

³⁵⁰ Empress Dowager Lü contributed to Liu Bang's rise, too. Her two brothers were both generals in Liu Bang's army. The execution of some ministers were due to Lü's planning. See *SJ* 9, 396.

Empress Dowager Lü's previous competitor and political enemy: the poisoning of Liu Ruyi and maltreatment of his mother, Lady Qi.

With the death of Emperor Xiaohui and the enthronement of the eleven-year old child emperor in 188 B.C.E., **the third and final stage** begins. The distance becomes even closer, the closest from Lü's beginnings until her death. The *Shi ji* pays particular attention to the small changes that inform the rise of Lü family. It starts with their working within the palace and taking important positions at the court. Once the death of Emperor Xiaohui was announced, the fifteen-year old son of Zhang Liang 張良 proposed to comfort the Empress Dowager by appointing three of her nephews, Lü Tai 呂臺, Lü Chan 呂產, and Lü Lu 呂祿, as generals in front of the prime minister.³⁵¹

七年秋八月戊寅，孝惠帝崩。發喪，太后哭，泣不下。留侯子張辟疆為侍中，年十五，謂丞相曰：「太后獨有孝惠，今崩，哭不悲，君知其解乎？」丞相曰：「何解？」辟疆曰：「帝毋壯子，太后畏君等。君今請拜呂臺、呂產、呂祿為將，將兵居南北軍，及諸呂皆入宮，居中用事，如此則太后心安，君等幸得脫禍矣。」丞相乃如辟疆計。太后說，其哭乃哀。呂氏權由此起。

³⁵²

On the day *wuyin* in the eighth month of the seventh year [188 B.C.E.], the Emperor Xiaohui passed away. Mourning started. The Empress Dowager wept but no tears fell down. The son of Marquis of Liu, Zhang Pijiang, was a page in the palace; he was in his fifteen year. [He] said to the Prime Minister, "The Empress Dowager only has [this son], Emperor Xiaohui. Now that he has died, she weeps but is not sorrowful. Do you know the answer?"

The Prime Minister asked, "What is the answer?"

³⁵¹ Zhang Liang was an important personage who assisted Liu Bang to get rid of trouble and win the final victory. *Shi ji* dedicated him a chapter in the *Shi ji*. See *SJ* 55.

³⁵² *SJ* 9, 399.

Pijiang said, “The Emperor does not have a grown son. The Empress Dowager is afraid of you. You should now ask to assign Lü Tai, Lü Chan, and Lü Lu as generals, to lead and live in the north and south garrisons, and request to let the members of the Lü lineage enter the palace and work there. If we do this, the Empress Dowager’s heart will be eased. You and your followers will, with luck, escape disaster.” The Prime Minister then followed Pijiang’s plan. The Empress Dowager was pleased. Thereafter, her weeping became mournful. The power of the Lü lineage rose from that point.

At the end of this excerpt from the *Shi ji*, we see the same pattern encountered before, indicated here by the underlined sentence: an episode followed by a comment emphasizing the significance of this step to the protagonist or her family.

With the ascendance of the new emperor, Liu Gong, who was still an eleven-year-old boy, Empress Dowager Lü became the leader of the empire both in name and in fact. From this stage on, she was able to issue official commands and to order personnel changes in the court. She also started to pave the way for the elevation of her family. The *Shi ji* presents her actions in the court with highly detailed descriptions. It repeatedly uses several temporal adverbs to show the sequence from the Empress Dowager’s intentions to actions, such as *xian* 先 (first, initially) and *nai* 乃 (then; thereafter). Wang Ling 王陵 (d. 181 B.C.E.) was the Prime Minister of the Right and insisted on an oath previously made by Liu Bang and his ministers, often referred to as the *baima zhi meng* 白馬之盟 (Oath of the White Horse): if anyone who was not a Liu family member became a prince, everyone should jointly attack him. This presented the Empress Dowager Lü with a great

problem if she were to make her relatives Princes. Therefore, Wang Ling was against making princes of Lü family members.³⁵³

However, in order to achieve her goal, the Empress Dowager ousted Wang Ling and took a gradual approach to elevating her family members: making them marquises and then princes. She started with the elder generation. The first step was to give the posthumous title of Prince to her oldest brother, who was the father of Lü Tai and had died many years earlier. Months later, she temporarily looked past the Lü family by ennobling Wu Ze, a meritorious minister serving Liu Bang, as the Marquis of Bocheng. She then moved on to make Lü Zhong the Marquis of Pei and Lü Ping the Marquis of Fuli.

元年，號令一出太后。太后稱制，議欲立諸呂為王，問右丞相王陵。王陵曰：「高帝刑白馬盟曰『非劉氏而王，天下共擊之』。今王呂氏，非約也。」太后不說。……十一月，太后欲廢王陵，乃拜為帝太傅，奪之相權。……乃追尊酈侯父為悼武王，欲以王諸呂為漸。四月，太后欲侯諸呂，乃先封高祖之功臣郎中令無擇為博城侯。……乃封呂種為沛侯，呂平為扶柳侯，張買為南宮侯。³⁵⁴

In the first year, a batch of commands and orders come from the Empress Dowager. She started governing officially. She began deliberations with the idea of making princes of several Lü family members, asking the Prime Minister of the Right.

Wang Ling said, “Emperor Gaozu slaughtered a white horse and said, ‘If someone who is not from the Liu clan is made prince, everyone [should] join together to attack him.’” In the eleventh month, the Empress Dowager, in order to remove Wang Ling, appointed him Grand Tutor to the Emperor and

³⁵³ *SJ* 9, 400. Liu Bang once swore an oath with his ministers, by killing a white horse and using its blood. Therefore, the oath is referred to as “白馬之盟.”

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 400.

deprived him of his authority as Prime Minister.... Then [she] posthumously honored the father of the Marquis of Li as Prince Daowu, intending to gradually make kings of Lü family members. In the fourth month, in order to make marquises of Lü family members, the Empress Dowager first enfeoffed Wuze, Prefect of the Palace Attendants, as the Marquis of Bocheng... Thereafter [she] enfeoffed Lü Zhong as Marquis of Pei, Lü Ping as Marquis of Fuli, and Zhang Mai as Marquis of Nangong.

She accompanied the elevation of Lü family members with the demotion and torture of princes of feudal states, who were sons of Liu Bang. The excerpt reads:

太后欲王呂氏，先立孝惠後宮子彊為淮陽王，子不疑為常山王，子山為襄城侯，子朝為軹侯，子武為壺關侯。太后風大臣，大臣請立酈侯呂臺為呂王，太后許之。……四年，封呂嫪為臨光侯，呂他為俞侯，呂更始為贅其侯，呂忿為呂城侯，及諸侯丞相五人。……[七年] 二月，徙梁王恢為趙王。呂王產徙為梁王，梁王不之國，為帝太傅。立皇子平昌侯太為呂王。(秋)，太傅產、丞相平等言，武信侯呂祿上侯，位次第一，請立為趙王。太后許之，追尊祿父康侯為趙昭王。九月，燕靈王建薨，有美人子，太后使人殺之，無後，國除。八年十月，立呂肅王子東平侯呂通為燕王，封通弟呂莊為東平侯。³⁵⁵

The Empress Dowager intended to make [several] princes of Lü family members. [She] first appoint Jiang, a son of Emperor Xiaohui from his harem, as Prince of Huiyang; a son, Buyi, as Prince of Changshan; a son, Shan, as Marquis of Xiangcheng; a son, Chao, as Marquis of Zhi; and a son, Wu, as Marquis of Huguan. The Empress Dowager made intimations to the great ministers, who [understand her message] requested that Lü Tai, Marquis of Li, be made Prince of Lü. The Empress Dowager has approved. ...In the fourth year, [the Empress Dowager] enfeoffed Lü Xu [her sister] as Marchioness of Lingguang, Lü Tuo as Marquis of Yu, Lü Gengshi as Marquis of Zhuiji, Lü Fen as Marquis of Lücheng, and five others as the chancellors of feudal states... In the second month of the [seventh year], she reassigned the Prince of Liang as Prince of Zhao. She reassigned the Prince of Lü, Chan, as Prince of Liang. The Prince of Liang did not go to his state but served as the Grand Tutor of the Emperor. [She] made Prince Tai the Prince of Lü. (In the autumn), the Grand Tutor, Chan, and the Prime Minister, Chen Ping, and others said, “Marquis of Wuxin should be the highest

³⁵⁵ Ibid. 404-405.

marquis, and ranked first. [Therefore], [they] requested to make him the Prince of Zhao.” The Empress Dowager approved the change, and posthumously made the father of Lu, Marquis of Kang, Prince of Zhao. In the ninth month, Prince Ling of Yan died and left a son born to a concubine. Empress Dowager sent someone to assassinate him. [Since the state of Yan then] had no offspring, the principedom was abolished.

According to the *Shi ji*, the elevation of Lü family members to marquises and princes was a highly complicated process, which depended on careful preparation, the eradication of princes from the Liu family, as well as supportive ministers. Through three stages, Empress Dowager Lü and her family rose from being commoners to princes and marquises. This chapter presents the entire process with changing distances. While the second and third stages are closer than stage one, stage one is indispensable because it serves as the foundation for the following stages. The detailed descriptions of stages one and two, through a number of small steps, show the importance of small changes in the court. In this way, *Shi ji* presents the process, emphasizing *how* events happened, rather than merely providing the results, to inform readers of *what* happened in history, like *Han shu*.

Although the *Han shu* repeats many passages from the *Shi ji* word for word, it presents the rise of Lü and her family in a different way. This is largely the result of its rearrangement of the chapter’s structure and contents. Although it includes all the important results of political affairs from Lü’s humble beginnings until her death, *Han shu* ignores the course of the past, which is a significant theme of *Shi ji*. I divide into the chapter in *Han shu* into two parts: the first part summarizing the important events and

policies of the Empress Dowager year by year until she died in the seventh year (180 B.C.E.); the second half describing the joint endeavor of Liu family members and great ministers supporting them in purging the Lü family.

How exactly the Empress Dowager realized her goal of securing benefits for the Lü family after the establishment of the empire was evidently significant for *Shi ji*, but not of interest to the *Han shu*. The latter cuts off the account of the processes, merely saving the overall results, these constituting “The Biographies of Imperial Family’s Maternal Relatives,”³⁵⁶ laying the groundwork of the basic facts for the reader to make moral judgments. It is true that the episodes kept in the *Han shu* also tell stories about their protagonists; nonetheless, they are essentially, a list of records. The complicated process of purging the Liu princes and elevating the sons of Lü family, which takes up about two thirds of the space in the Empress Dowager’s annals in *Shi ji*, was summarized in three sentences below in the *Han shu*. It reads:

太后臨朝稱制。復殺高祖子趙幽王友、共王恢及燕靈王建。遂立周呂侯子臺為呂王，臺弟產為梁王，建城侯釋之子祿為趙王，台子通為燕王，又封諸呂凡六人皆為列侯，追尊父呂公為呂宣王，兄周呂侯為悼武王。³⁵⁷

The Empress Dowager went to the court meetings and started ruling officially. [She] killed the son of Emperor Gaozu, You, Prince You of Zhao, Hui, Prince Gong of Zhao, and Jian, Prince Ling of Yan. Thereafter, [she] appointed Lü Tai, a son of Marquis of Zhoulü, as Prince of Lü, and Tai’s younger brother, Chan, as Prince of Liang; Lu, the son of Shizhi. Marquis of Jiancheng, as Prince of Zhao, and a son of Tai, Tong, as Prince of Yan. [She] also enfeoffed six members of the

³⁵⁶ *HS* 97.

³⁵⁷ *HS* 97. 3939.

Lü family as marquises, posthumously made her father, Lord Lü as Prince of Lüxuan, her older brother, Marquis of Zhoulü, as Prince of Daowu.

In the basic annals, *Han shu* tells the reader that sons of Emperor Xiaohui were made princes and marquises in the first edict.³⁵⁸ Thereafter, the text proceeds with another edict about appointing more marquises. However, juxtaposed at the beginning of this chapter, neither of these two items is connected with the rise of Lü family, nor do they suggest any inner connections. I cite the section, which preserves her actions and the second edict below:

立孝惠後宮子強為淮陽王，不疑為恆山王，弘為襄城侯，朝為軹侯，武為壺關侯。秋，桃李華。二年春，詔曰：「高皇帝匡飭天下，諸有功者皆受分地為列侯，萬民大安，莫不受休德。朕思念至於久遠而功名不著，亡以尊大誼，施後世。今欲差次列侯功以定朝位，臧于高廟，世世勿絕，嗣子各襲其功位。其與列侯議定奏之。」³⁵⁹

[The Empress Dowager] installed a son of Emperor Xiaohui from his harem, as Prince of Huiyang; a son, Buyi, as Prince of Hengshan; a son, Hong, as Marquis of Xiangcheng; a son, Chao, as Marquis of Zhi; and a son, Wu, as Marquis of Huguan. In the autumn, peach trees and plum trees blossomed. In the spring of the second year, [she] issued an edict, saying “Emperor Gaozu corrected the empire and put it in order. Various meritorious ministers all received a portion of estate and became marquises. The myriad people are greatly secure. There is no one who does not benefit from the generosity of [Emperor Gaozu]. I was thinking that [his] merits and fames will become vague as time goes on and there will be no means to worship the great principles and extend them to his descendants. Now I intend to distinguish the rank of marquises’ merits in order to decide [their] positions at court. I shall keep [the list] in the temple of Emperor Gaozu, for each generation [to follow] without interruption. Each heir will inherit [his ancestors’] merit and position. May it be discussed by the marquises, decided, and reported [to me].”

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 3939.

³⁵⁹ *HS* 3. 96.

In *Shi ji*, the Empress Dowager made sons of Emperor Xiaohui princes and marquises *because* it paved the path to elevate members of her family. However, the above excerpt is just a summation of *what* happened in the first year, followed by an edict issued in the second year. Neither the context nor the goal of the enfeoffing her relatives was mentioned. The elevation of Lü Chan and Lü Lu, the torture of the Liu princes, and the removal of Liu Gong, were inserted into a list of brief entries from 188 to 180 B.C.E., sometimes with a citation from a relevant edict.

One may argue that the *Han shu* merely reorganizes some of the segments in “The Basic Annals of Empress Dowager Lü” in *Shi ji* and that this reorganization does not mean a reduction, because Ban Gu just relocated parts of these materials into other chapters, such as “The Biographies of Imperial Family’s Maternal Relatives” (“Wai qi zhuan” 外戚傳) and “The Biography of Gaozu’s Five Princes” (“Gao wu wang zhuan” 高五王傳). However, relocating parts of the texts breaks the logical arrangement of *Shi ji*. The granting of the sons of Emperor Xiaohui becomes a single event; therefore, it does not mean anything more than an isolated fact to readers. So does the edict cited word for by word. The above quotation from the *Han shu* is therefore simply a list of major policies implemented in the first two years after the enthronement of the new emperor, Liu Gong.

Han shu presents much of its information in the form of edicts, as shown in the previous paragraph. From the perspective of historical study, using such ostensibly

reliable documents directly in the narration might be a convincing technique. However, as a final and official form of the transmission of information, these documents are a result of polishing and refinement, not only for the elegance of language but more importantly for *hiding* the real purpose of a certain policy. One example is the edict concerning with the deposition of Liu Gong.³⁶⁰ Empress Dowager Lü officially ruled the empire for eight years of Liu Gong's reign. Each year in this chapter has an entry, and half of them are presented by edicts. My argument is not that the organization of *Shi ji* is better or more artful, but that *Shi ji* and *Han shu* focus on different issues. *Shi ji* emphasizes in its presentation of the course of history the *how*, in terms of the context of events and actions of characters, whereas the priority of *Han shu*, choosing to include more edicts and less narration, is simply to present the “facts” of the past with supporting documents.

4.3 Perspective

In addition to distance, perspective is another way to regulate information in a narrative. It refers to the point of view from which the story is told. I will analyze the

³⁶⁰ The Empress Dowager Lü secretly killed his mother and claimed that he was the son of Empress Zhang, who was the granddaughter of Empress Dowager Lü. When Liu Gong learnt this, he said he would avenge his mother. For this reason, the Empress Dowager decided to install another grandson. In order to hide this secret within the palace, the edict of deposing Liu Gong just fabricated that Liu Gong had been ill for a long time and could not manage state affairs. See *HS* 3. 98.

perspective of *Shi ji* from two angles: that of the narrator and that of the characters in narratives.

4.3.1 The Omniscient Narrator

A character in a story can tell a story; or, an analytic or omniscient narrator can tell a story. In the Chinese historiographical tradition, historians tell events in the past in their writings and made themselves omniscient authors. This means that the narrators pretend to know everything when they narrate; space and time are not problems for them. They can narrate which events happened at the same time but in different locations; in most cases, they also know what will happen next while readers are still engaged with the current passage.

In “The Basic Annals of the Empress Dowager Lü,” the two nephews of the Empress Dowager Lü, Lü Chan and Lü Lu, controlled the Southern Garrison and the Northern Garrison respectively. Great ministers who were against the Empress Dowager and the Liu family schemed to eradicate the Lü lineage by first seizing their military powers: the *taiwei* (Grand Commandant 太尉), Zhou Bo (周勃? - 169 B.C.E.), therefore, sent Li Ji 酈寄 and Liu Jie twice to persuade Lü Lu to surrender his seal (the credential of the military power) as *shangjiangjun* (the chief-general 上將軍). The passage below describes the second time, when Lü Lu was persuaded to do so.

太尉復令鄴寄與典客劉揖先說呂祿曰：「帝使太尉守北軍，欲足下之國，急歸將印辭去，不然，禍且起。」呂祿以為鄴兄不欺己，遂解印屬典客，而以兵授太尉。……呂產不知呂祿已去北軍，乃入未央宮，欲為亂，殿門弗得入，裴回往來。³⁶¹

The Grand Commander sent Li Yi and the Director of Guests, Liu Jie, to convince Lü Lu, saying, “The Emperor placed the Grand Commander to be in charge of the Northern Garrison and wishes for you to go [back] to your estate. Promptly return your general’s seal and take your leave. Otherwise, disaster will occur.” Lü Lu believed that Li Kuang was not deceiving him. Therefore, [he] untied the seal and entrusted it to the Director of Guests, and transferred his troops to the Grand Commander... Lü Chan did not know Lü Lu had left the Northern Garrison. Therefore, he entered the Palace of Weiyang and intended to rebel. [He] was unable to enter and paced back and forth.

The narrator knows more than the characters, Lü Lu and Lü Chan. He tells the reader that Li Ji and Liu Jie did not talk to Lü Lu as real friends. Instead, it was just a political trick. Meanwhile, since Lü Chan was unaware that Lü Lu had agreed to resign his position, Lü Chan still intended to foment chaos in the imperial palace. Omniscient narrators, whose knowledge is not limited to a specific space or time, are capable of highlighting contrasts between characters, who only know what happened within their purview.

Another example is “The Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin,” where Sima Qian presents the military circumstances of the three competing warlords, Liu Bang, Xiang Yu, and Han Xin. The narrator can freely switch the scene from Xiang’s camp in

³⁶¹ *SJ* 9. 409.

Chu to Han's living room in Qi. He knows what each character said at any place and even the plans of schemers of various camps.³⁶²

This is not the first time that we have an omniscient narrator in the tradition of Chinese historical writing. Chinese historical writings are always composed after the historical events happened. This allows the narrator to know more than the characters involved. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the narrator of *Zuo zhuan* knows more than their characters. Almost all of its predictions are verified. Examining the correct and incorrect predictions is a way to date the text.³⁶³ Therefore, in many occasions, it is rational to say that the authors wrote about the predictions or portents after the event itself happened.

4.3.2 Diverse Perspectives of Characters

4.3.2.1 Psychological descriptions

The *Shi ji* goes further than its predecessors in presenting the perspective of characters, because it even portrays the inner thoughts of the characters. One may think this is common for omniscient narrators, but it is to be noted that this is the first time that psychological description appears in historical works. Works such as, *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu*, sometimes contains detailed descriptions of battles and discussions which often

³⁶² *SJ* 92, 2619-20.

³⁶³ Goldin, "The Hermeneutics of Emmentaler," 76.

include direct quotations, but they do not include the inner thoughts, such as the feelings and intentions of characters.

One typical example in *Shi ji* is the first meeting of the dancing girl of Zhao and Zichu 子楚 in “The Biography of Lü Buwei” 呂不韋列傳.³⁶⁴ This dancing girl, also known as Zhao Ji 趙姬 (Lady Zhao), was actually the mother of the future the First Emperor (259-210). While Zichu is recognized as First Emperor’s father, Lü was the biographical father.³⁶⁵ Lü was a wealthy businessman who met Zichu in Handan 邯鄲, the capital of Zhao. Zichu was one of the younger sons of the Crown Prince of Qin, Lord Anguo 安國君. Since Zichu was not favored and seemingly had no chance of becoming an important figure, he was sent to Zhao as a hostage.³⁶⁶ After the first meeting, Lü Buwei noticed the potential political value of Zichu and believed that Zichu had a chance of becoming the King of Qin by first becoming Lord Anguo’s designated heir. Therefore, Lü decided to invest in Zichu, hoping to change both Zichu’s life and his own lives. The short episode below happened in the middle of this endeavor.

呂不韋取邯鄲諸姬絕好善舞者與居，知有身。子楚從不韋飲，見而說之，因起為壽，請之。呂不韋怒，念業已破家為子楚，欲以釣奇，乃遂獻其姬。³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ *SJ* 85. 2505-14. Zichu, with the help of Lü Buwei, succeeded the throne of Qin and therefore became King Zhuangxiang of Qin (秦莊襄王 r.250-247 B.C.E.)

³⁶⁵ According to the quotation above, the First Emperor’s biological father was Lü Buwei.

³⁶⁶ During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.E.), battles and alliance among states were subject to the fast-changing circumstances. In order to establish trust among the allies, states sent low-ranking royal or ducal sons as hostage to each other.

³⁶⁷ *SJ* 85. 2508.

Lü Buwei had selected from among the ladies of Handan one of matchless beauty and great skill in dancing and had lived with her, and he was aware that she was with child. Zichu, joining Buwei to drink, happened to catch sight of her and was pleased with her. Thereafter, he stood up and proposed a toast to [Buwei] and requested to have her. Lü Buwei was outraged, but he thought of the fact that he had by now invested all of his family's [wealth] in Zichu and hoped to fish up a marvelous prize. Therefore, he presented his girl to [Zichu].

Here we access Lü Buwei's mind: although he was angry about Zichu's request of having his lover, when he thought about the money that he had already spent for Zichu, he decided to relinquish his woman as well. These psychological descriptions not only add fun to narratives, but also serve to set up connections among characters' actions. In this example, the thoughts of Lü Buwei explain why he was able to present his own lover and unborn son to Zichu. Only an omniscient narrator can have this feature.

4.3.2.2 Perspective in the Form of Speeches

Readers of *Shi ji* may have the feeling that many of its chapters, the biographical sections in particular, read like a novel. One reason is that the characters in narratives seem to say what they *would naturally* say, instead of what the author has *forced* them say. In other words, the conversations and speeches of characters match well with their identities well. Unlike the characters in the *Zuo zhuan*, who speak for the authors behind the text as they try to convey moral lessons, *Shi ji* gives more freedom to its characters, including both protagonists and those supporting roles. Since speeches are a significant

aspect of *Shi ji*'s characterization (to be discussed Chapter 5, below,) I will limit myself here to discussing the feature of speeches that defines who perceives the events, whether physically or mentally.

“The Biography of Wu Zixu” in the *Shi ji* is one of the chapters whose major characters are described both in the *Zuo zhuan* and *Shi ji*.³⁶⁸ Avenging the killing of one's father by the king is not only the theme of Wu Zixu's 伍子胥 (559-484 B.C.E.) story, but also the subject of the supporting roles in secondary, but related narratives.

The story of Wu Zixu in *Shi ji* begins with his father's unfair punishment at the hands of the ruler, King Ping of Chu 楚平王 (r. 528-516 B.C.E.). After more than ten years, Wu Zixu finally gets help from the state of Wu; King Ping of Chu has already died and his son, King Zhao, has succeeded him. After five battles, Zixu leads Wu's army and enters Ying 郢, the capital of Chu. Therefore, King Zhao flees to Yun.³⁶⁹ However, the Lord of Yun and his younger brother disagree as to whether to help King Zhao. The excerpt from *Shi ji* reads:

昭王出亡，入雲夢；盜擊王，王走郢。郢公弟懷曰：「平王殺我父，我殺其子，不亦可乎！」郢公恐其弟殺王，與王奔隨。³⁷⁰

King Zhao left [Chu] in order to escape and entered the marshes of Yunmeng. Bandits attacked Chu and the King fled to Yun. The younger brother of Lord Yun, Huai, said, “King Ping killed our father. Would it not be acceptable if we killed

³⁶⁸ *SJ* 66. 2171-83.

³⁶⁹ Yun 郢 is small state, *SJ* 66. 2176.

³⁷⁰ *SJ* 66. 2176.

his son?” The Lord of Yun feared that his younger brother would kill the King. [Therefore,] he fled with the King to [the state of] Sui.

The same event takes three times as much space in *Zuo zhuan* because the conversation between the brothers there is longer. This is not because it offers more information about the characters, nor previous events, but because it includes a quotation from the *Odes* and a didactic message after that.

鄭公辛之弟懷，將弑王曰，平王殺吾父，我殺其子，不亦可乎，辛曰，君討臣，誰敢讎之，君命天也，若死天命，將誰讎，詩曰，柔亦不茹，剛亦不吐，不侮矜寡，不畏彊禦，唯仁者能之，違彊陵弱，非勇也，乘人之約，非仁也，滅宗廢祀，非孝也，動無令名，非知也，必犯是，余將殺女，鬪辛與其弟巢，以王奔隨。³⁷¹

The younger brother of Lord Xin of Yun, Huai, was going to assassinate King [Zhao]. He said, “King Ping killed our father. Would it not be acceptable if I were to kill his son?”

Xin said: “When a ruler kills a subject, who dares to consider him an enemy? The ruler’s order is [the will of] Heaven. If a man dies by the will of Heaven, whom are you going to regard as the enemy? The *Odes* says, ‘Neither devouring the mild, nor rejecting the strong. Neither insulting the poor nor a widower; nor fearing the powerful.’ Only truly humane people can do these. To avoid the powerful but insult weak is not valor; to take advantage of another’s straits is contrary to benevolence; to destroy one’s ancestral temple and cause the discontinuance of its sacrifice is contrary to filial piety; to take action which will have no proper name is contrary to wisdom. If you must violate these [principles], I will kill you.” Dou Xin and his other younger brother, Chao, fled with the King to Sui.

The *Shi ji* does not cite any didactic discourse in its version of Lord Xin of Yun’s 鄭公辛 speech; instead of teaching moral lessons through characters’ speeches, it concisely introduces the essence of the plot.

³⁷¹ ZZ, Ding 4.3, 1546-47.

Moreover, the speech of *Shi ji*'s characters matches with their identity, such as their background, personality, and occasion, as shown in the next example. Chen She 陳涉 (d. 208 B.C.E.) was an important historical personage in the Qin-Han transition. In the second year of the Second Emperor of Qin 秦二世 (209 B.C.E.), Chen She launched the first rebellion against the rule of the Qin.³⁷² This uprising inspired many other generals and lords from all over the Qin Empire, such as Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, to overthrow the Qin in the transitional period from 209 to 202 B.C.E. When Chen She was young, he was just a hired farmhand, but had already demonstrated his outstanding personality. However, a mediocre man (*yongzhe* 庸者) laughed at his ambition when they are farming together in fields:

陳涉少時，嘗與人傭耕，輟耕之壟上，悵悵久之，曰：「苟富貴，無相忘。」庸者笑而應曰：「若為庸耕，何富貴也？」陳涉太息曰：「嗟乎，燕雀安知鴻鵠之志哉！」³⁷³

When Chen She was young, he was once hired to plough with others. He stopped farming and went to the top of a hillock. He was melancholy for a long time, saying, "If we become rich and noble, may we not forget each other."

A mediocre man laughed and responded, "You are a hired peasant. How could you become rich and noble?"

Chen She sighed and said, "Alas! How little do sparrows know the ambition of a swan!"

Chen She distinguishes himself from the rest of hired men in the fields through his speech. It suggests Chen She's ambition and foreshadows his later success. In

³⁷² This rebellion was called "dazaxiang" uprising 大澤鄉起義.

³⁷³ *SJ* 48.1949-65.

addition, the mediocre man's speech also suggests the reasons why he is called *yongzhe*. Chen She's response, in which he compares the mediocre man to a songbird and himself to a great swan, illustrates the remarkable difference between them.

In 209 B.C.E., Chen She declared himself the King of Chu. The mediocre man hears of it and goes to visit him. He is surprised by the pleasant setting of the palace where King Chen lives. This mediocre man exclaims in his native language, the Chu dialect. It vividly conveys his feelings, humble background, and perduring vulgarity, in congruity with the previous episode on the farm.

入宮，見殿屋帷帳，客曰：「夥頤！涉之為王沈沈者！」楚人謂多為夥，故天下傳之，夥涉為王，由陳涉始。³⁷⁴

Entering the palace and seeing the halls decorated with curtains and trappings, the guest said, "Oh, a heap [of stuff you have]! You can have such a magnificent [palace] because you have become a king!" The people of Chu say "a heap" when they mean "much." Therefore, [people of] all under Heaven has transmitted that. "Heaping She" became a king; this [saying] comes from Chen She.

In these two episodes, speeches push forward the plot and build characters' personalities. They do not advance any straightforwardly interpretable authorial message, as in *Zuo zhuan* or *Guo yu*; rather, characters perceive the same events from different perspectives, which they seem to express in their own words.

The theme of "The Biography of Wu Zixu" is avenging one's father. Although the primary story in this chapter is Wu Zixu's course of revenge, it contains three secondary

³⁷⁴ *SJ* 48. 1960.

revenge stories in which fathers were killed by a ruler, and five characters' differing opinions differ regarding revenge. *Shi ji* presents their speeches, which express contrasting or completely opposite ideas. First, Wu Zixu and his older brother, Wu Shang 伍尚, have different thoughts on how to respond to the spurious summons from their father (see below). This chapter also involves the question of how to treat one's native state, because Wu Zixu's vengeance on his native state and its ruler strongly conflicts with the philosophy espoused by Shen Baoxu 申包胥. Similarly, in the previous example, Lord Xin of Yun and his younger brother disagree on revenging their father by killing their enemy's son, King Zhao of Chu. The last relevant character is Sheng, also known as the Lord of Bai 白公勝, a grandson of King Ping. As the narration proceeds, the same subject is seen through the eyes of the five characters, one after another.

Wu Zixu's father, Wu She 伍奢, is the Grand Tutor of the Crown Prince of Chu, Jian 建, who is the father of Sheng. Following the suggestion of Jian's sycophantic Lesser Tutor of Jian, Bi Wuji 費無極, King Ping of Chu appropriates the Crown Prince's beautiful fiancée for himself. Bi, worrying that Jian would execute him after ascending the throne, fabricates the lie that Jian is plotting rebellion. Wu She, as Jian's Grand Tutor, admonishes the King, but is imprisoned. Bi suggests to King Ping that he should arrest Wu She's two sons by tricking them into returning to Chu, because their talents will pose a threat to Chu. Therefore, King Ping sends an emissary to summon the sons and deceive them with the promise if returned, their father would be spared.

In the discussion between Wu Shang and Zixu, Zixu suggests using the power of another state to avenge their father. In contrast, his brother prefers to die with his father because he is anxious about being ridiculed if he fails to avenge his father.

伍奢欲往，員曰：“楚之召我兄弟，非欲以生我父也，恐有脫者后生患，故以父為質，詐召二子。二子到，則父子俱死。何益父之死？往而令仇不得報耳。不如奔他國，借力以雪父之恥，俱滅，無為也。”伍尚曰：“我知往終不能全父命。然恨父召我以求而不往，后不能雪恥，終為天下笑耳。”謂員曰：“可去矣！汝終能報殺父之仇，我將歸死。”³⁷⁵

Wu Shang wanted to return [to Chu]. Yun said, “Chu summoned us two brothers not because they intend to spare our father, [but because] they fear that if we the escape, we will cause difficulties [for them]. Therefore, they made our father a hostage and deceitfully summoned us, his two sons. When we arrive, father and sons will die together. How will that help with our father’s death? Going will only make us fail to attain our vengeance. It would be better to flee to another state and borrow its power to expunge our father’s disgrace. To perish together means doing nothing.”

Wu Shang said, “I know that going will not save our father’s life in the end; but I would hate not to go when our father summons us in the hope [remaining alive], [or] if later we are unable to expunge the disgrace, we will be ridiculed by the people of the empire!” Then he said to Yun, “You can depart [now]. You can avenge yourself on enemies who killed our father. I will return home and die.”

Zixu and his brother make different decisions, although they agree that they should avenge their father even if their enemy is the ruler of their native state. After continuous efforts in Wu, a neighboring state, Zixu finally leads the Wu army, defeats the army of Chu, and enters the capital of Chu. Zixu digs up the corpse of King Zhao and whips it hundreds of times. Shen Baoxu 申包胥, a previous friend of Zixu, believes that Zixu has

³⁷⁵ SJ 66. 2172. For more discussion about Wu Zixu, see Durrant’s *The Cloudy Mirror*, 71-97.

gone too far to avenge his father. In contrast to Zixu's dedication to revenge, Shen Baoxu is determined to do exactly the opposite: save his native state of Chu. He clearly expresses that Zixu, as a former subject of Chu and whose father has served King Ping, has been excessive:

始伍員與申包胥為交，員之亡也，謂包胥曰：「我必覆楚。」包胥曰：「我必存之。」及吳兵入郢，伍子胥求昭王。既不得，乃掘楚平王墓，出其尸，鞭之三百，然後已。申包胥亡於山中，使人謂子胥曰：「子之報讎，其以甚乎！吾聞之，人眾者勝天，天定亦能破人。今子故平王之臣，親北面而事之，今至於僇死人，此豈其無天道之極乎！」³⁷⁶

At first, Wu Yun (Zixu) and Shen Baoxu were friends. When Yun fled, he told Baoxu "I must overthrow Chu."

Boxu said, "I must preserve it." When the Wu troops entered Ying, Wu Zixu sought out King Zhao. Not finding him, [Zixu] then dug up the tomb of King Ping of Chu, exhumed his corpse and whipped hundreds of times before stopping. Shen Baoxu escaped into the mountains and sent someone to tell Zixu, "Your vengeance is too extreme. I have heard that, when one has a large number of supporters, one will defeat Heaven, but Heaven can also surely defeat humans. You were a former subject of King Ping, and your parent faced north and served him; however, now you have even insulted the dead. Is this not the utmost in lacking the way of Heaven?"

Although Shen Baoxu conflicts with Wu Zixu, *Shi ji* presents his reasons and thoughts clearly. From the later narration, we know that Shen Baoxu goes to Qin to seek for aid. The King of Qin is moved by his determination and sends troops to Chu to fight against Wu. Finally, Wu is defeated and retreats from Chu.

The last secondary story is about the Lord of Bai, who is the son of Jian and grandson of King Ping. Jian flees to the state of Zheng and is killed by Zheng. His son,

³⁷⁶ *SJ* 66. 2176.

Sheng, later goes back to Chu, seeking an opportunity to avenge himself on Zheng with the help of Chu's army. Unfortunately for him, the *linyīn* 令尹 (Prime Minister) of Chu, Zixi 子西, decides to join Zheng's alliance. Therefore, Zixi becomes Sheng's new enemy. Sheng kills Zixi in order to avenge the death of his father. In addition, as the grandson of King Ping, he intends to kill the current king of Chu, King Hui (r. 489-432 B.C.E.), and set himself up as the new king. At the end, Sheng and his followers are defeated and he himself commits suicide.

In these three tales of vengeance, we are given access to five characters' different opinions. The text does use the characters to advertise the author's philosophy. All the characters are given a chance to express their own opinions.

Marked by the phrase "The Grand Historian says," we have Sima Qian's voice appearing in the form of comments at the end of this chapter, where he evaluates the vengeance of Zixu and Sheng:

太史公曰：怨毒之於人甚矣哉！王者尚不能行之於臣下，況同列乎！向令伍子胥從伍奢俱死，何異螻蟻。棄小義，雪大恥，名垂于後世，悲夫！方子胥窘于江上，道乞食，志豈須臾忘郢邪？故隱忍就功名，非烈丈夫孰能致此哉？白公如不自立為君者，其功謀亦不可勝道者哉！³⁷⁷

The Grand Historian says: The poison of resentment toward another person can be extreme! Even rulers cannot [afford] to provoke it in their subjects; how much less so can equals? Suppose Wu Zixu had followed Wu She in death—how would he have been different from an ant? [But] he gave up a lesser principle in order to expunge a great disgrace, and his name has been passed on to later generations. It is sorrowful! When Zixu was stuck in trouble on the river and begged for food on

³⁷⁷ *SJ* 66. 2183.

streets, did he forget Ying for a single moment? Thus, endurance makes one achieve the merit and fame. If he had not been staunch man, how would he have been able to achieve it? If Lord of Bai had not installed himself as the ruler [of Chu], his merits and strategies would also be beyond recounting!

Although Sima Qian suggested that Wu Zixu's choice to pursue revenge had more of an impact than his brother's decision to accept death, and that Sheng's action were partially worthy, we do not know how Sima Qian judged his characters; even his comments at the end do not necessarily mean that he only admires Wu Zixu and not Shen Baoxu. He separates his own comments from episodes in the text with the phrase "The Grand Historian says" rather than intruding on his characters' speeches. The reader is given the chance to observe characters' disagreements and judge their character on his own.

Comparisons of parallels between the *Shi ji* and other historical works, such as *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*, can produce different effects without changing a story's fact. Narrative structure can heavily influence the effects of a text. The distance of *Shi ji* is closer than both *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*. By preserving multiple perspectives of narration, *Shi ji* enables the reader to gain access to the characters' thoughts and speeches. It facilitates a presentation of process and reinforces the effects brought by close distance. These two devices, close distance and multiple perspectives, distinguish the *Shi ji* from both earlier and later works: it pays close attention to *how* the historical process takes place.

By focusing *how* historical events happened, it seems that the *Shi ji* declines to answer the readers' interest in the past directly, but, rather, inspires them to contemplate the issues and thereby provide answers for themselves. The *Zuo zhuan* presents a neat pattern, answering *why* a historical event ends as it does; The *Han shu* provides readers with facts to judge the historical personages. The past presented in *Shi ji*, by contrast, is so complicated that there is no easy answer. All it can answer is the *how* question.

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTERIZATION

Numerous readers over the past two millennia have been impressed by the vivid characters in *Shi ji*, which are sculpted out of various aspects, such as their looks, speeches, actions, thoughts, personalities, and so on. While readers and scholars have praised these successful portraits, few studies have examined *how* these realistic and lifelike effects are achieved. This question is crucial because it is closely related to the structure of *Shi ji*, which impacts the function of *Shi ji* as a history—in other words, what kind of question *Shi ji* answers.

This chapter explores the approaches of *Shi ji* to characterization and its effects from a structural perspective. I shall first define character and characterization, which both shed light on the characterization process. Next, I will show the aspects in which characters in the *Shi ji* are different from those of its predecessors, such as *Shang shu*, *Zuo zhuan*, and *Guo yu*. Characterization in *Shi ji* leads to two important features of the book: the fixed reading order and the balance of coherence and contrast in the characters' personalities. Finally, I will analyze the effects brought about by these features on the function of *Shi ji* as a work of history. In line with my argument of Chapter 4, I argue that the highly personalized characters, achieved through literary speeches and psychological portraits within a detailed context, contribute to the representation of the historical process in this text.

5.1 Character and Characterization

Yang Xiong 揚雄 commented on the style of *Shi ji* as follows: “Zichang [i.e. Sima Qian] had a great love; it was a love for the strange.” 子長多愛,愛奇也。³⁷⁸

Durrant uses it to explain the literary attractions of the text.³⁷⁹ Zhang Dake argues that characters in the *Shi ji* are vivid, because Sima Qian selected representative historical personages with dramatic life experiences. He also points out that Sima’s literary techniques, such as *huxianfa* 互現法 (mutual illustration), contrasts, and storytelling style significantly contribute to his portraits of lifelike characters³⁸⁰; however, his analysis focuses on the effects of certain narrative techniques rather than on *how* they are applied in the *Shi ji*. In other words, Zhang’s discussion is more about the results of applying the devices instead of their application *per se*. Although these scholars, to some extent, explain why *Shi ji* is fun to read, they have not touched upon the root of this issue.

Understanding the nature of character in literary works contributes to a deep analysis of *Shi ji*’s characters, including their features and implications. Characters resemble people. Sometimes characters in narratives resemble a real human so much that a reader goes so far as to identify with the character, to cry and to laugh, as the narrative

³⁷⁸ Yang Xiong, *Fayan yishu*, juan 12, 507.

³⁷⁹ Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 131.

³⁸⁰ Zhang Dake, *Shi ji yan jiu*, 483-95.

moves on. But characters and people are not the same. According to Mieke Bal, “They [i.e. the former] are fabricated creatures made up from fantasy, imitation, memory: paper people, without flesh and blood.”³⁸¹ The latter, in contrast, are self-contained real people in real worlds. The anti-realistic treatment of character is first established by Aristotle, who believed that characters are subordinate to or determined by the narrative action.³⁸² Barthes understands character as the web of semes attached to a proper name.³⁸³ Wellek and Warren claimed that a character consists only of the words by which it is described or into whose mouth they are put by the author.³⁸⁴

Gerald Prince defines character in a broader sense:

What we really call a character is a topic (or ‘logical participant’) common to a set of propositions predicating of it at least some characteristics generally associated with human beings: the logical participant may be endowed with certain human physical attributes, for instance, and think, will, speak, laugh, etc.³⁸⁵

I find this definition particularly useful for the current study for three reasons.

First, it clearly explicates the nature of “character.” Unlike scholarship discussed above, this definition points out the humane element in a character, but it is also flexible enough that non-human being characters can be included. As Prince notes, “the nature of the logical participant is clearly not important, though it is usually identified as a person, but

³⁸¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 115.

³⁸² Jannidis, “Character,” 30.

³⁸³ Barthes, *S/Z*, 67.

³⁸⁴ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 16.

³⁸⁵ Prince, *Narratology*, 71.

should a horse be portrayed as philosophizing and should a table be described as thinking and speaking, they would both constitute characters.”³⁸⁶

Second, by integrating “propositions” into the definition, it indicates that different readers’ impressions and evaluations may vary. This is related to my analysis of the reader’s participation in the reading process in Chapter 2.³⁸⁷ As Prince illustrates, because there are indefinitely many (pragmatic) presuppositions, implications, and connotations to a set of propositions, different readers’ perception of the same character may vary.³⁸⁸ Although readers will isolate the same set, they will think of different connotations limited to their own context.

Third, Prince’s definition delineates a process of how a character is built, rather than a static description of a completed character. When portraying a character, it must be fore-grounded at least once in a narrative. He also notes that it emphasizes the attribution of traits to a topic. This is greatly helpful to the current study, because the definition describes the process from a structural perspective, allowing me to examine the presentation of characters in the *Shi ji* by focusing on the process of attributing traits.

This process results in agents’ having these properties in the storyworld is known as characterization. “Characterization may be direct, as when a trait is ascribed explicitly to a character, or indirect, when it is the result of inferences drawn from the text based

³⁸⁶ Ibid, 71.

³⁸⁷ See 2.4 Multiplicity of Meanings, 115.

³⁸⁸ Prince, *Narratology*, 71.

partly on world knowledge and especially the different forms of character knowledge mentioned above.”³⁸⁹ “Some textually explicit ascriptions of properties to a character may turn out to be invalid, as when this information is attributable to an unreliable→ narrator or to a fellow-character. Moreover, a textual ascription may turn out to be hypothetical or purely subjective.”³⁹⁰

Like other literary works, historical writings also have characterization processes. For example, characterization plays an important role in the *Shi ji*. One feature of characterization in the historical writings is that their characters are named after historical personages, who once lived in the past. For this reason, as shown in Chapter 1, what readers can get access to in historical works is a reconstructed literary world, rather than the real past. Historians are not allowed to make up events, but they can fill in the gaps of events by imagining actions, speeches and psychological portraits as long as the imagination is plausible. Indeed, historians, in practice, have to do this from time to time in order to present a coherent and rational narrative on the basis of fragments of information. In other words, the attributes of characters are subject to composition.

From the perspective of readers, there are various approaches to verify whether an event happened, such as textual verification and archaeological evidence, but it is difficult or almost impossible to be certain about what a historical personage did, spoke, or thought in the middle of an event. Therefore, characterization is often necessary in

³⁸⁹ Jannidis, “Character,” in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 15.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 21.

historical writing, and the approaches to characterization in these works are comparable to those of other genres, such as fiction. On the one hand, they are only parts of the storyworlds not self-contained. In other words, the reader will never have any knowledge about a character that is not told in narratives. On the other hand, characters are subject to readers' assumptions about what is relevant in the process of communication that determines the scope and validity of inferences.³⁹¹ Therefore, the presentation of characters and the construction of characters in the reader's mind are both dynamic processes.

Shi ji has been worshiped for centuries because of its vivid portraits of characters. Among numerous reasons, one is its complexity of characters. This is why round characters are more attractive than flat ones. These are two classic types of characters pointed out by E.M. Forster. According to him, "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it is never surprising, it is flat."³⁹²

"The Biography of General Li"³⁹³ is a well-known chapter because of its lifelike descriptions of the protagonist. It is a good example of round characters in the *Shi ji*. The historical personage Li Guang 李廣 (?-119 B.C.) was a general who served in the court of three emperors and participated in campaigns and defense against the Xiongnu several times over a period of decades. However, the character Li Guang is a representation of

³⁹¹ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 1986.

³⁹² Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 118.

³⁹³ *SJ* 109.

the real general, without flesh and blood, constituted by his attributes in ten episodes in the text, as discussed in Chapter 4.³⁹⁴

The character's complexity is achieved through a series of episodes. He is a military hero with both virtues and vices. More importantly is that they are not incompatible. For example, Li Guang is conceited and considered himself a revered general because of his military talents. The gatekeeper of Baling refuses to open the city gate after he tells the gatekeeper that he is the former general Li. This outraged him because his reputation, which he valued very much, did not help him enter the gate. Another example is that Li Guang treats soldiers very well, in contrast to the strictness of another contemporary general, Cheng Bushi 程不識. The reality is that because of his arrogance, on several occasions he and his army are trapped, exactly the opposite of what he would like to see. In this sense, his talents and heroic characteristics lead to his shortcomings.

Characterization in *Shi ji* is distinctive. Below I shall focus on two aspects, speech integrated with actions and psychological portraits, in order to illustrate the specific quality of characterization in *Shi ji*. I will analyze its features and the effects produced by these features.

³⁹⁴ See the example of Li Guang in 4.2.1 Distance, 211.

5.2 Action and Speech

Speech is a common way to ascribe a property to a character in narrative literature. It is widely used in early Chinese histories, such as *Shi ji* and *Zuo zhuan*. I examine the features of speeches in these works and show that differences in the character's speech explains why *Shi ji*'s characters are more attractive.

5.2.1 Speech in *Shi ji*

One major function of speech in *Shi ji* is to reveal characters' personalities. Two typical examples in *Shi ji* are Xiang Yu's and Liu Bang's different reactions when they watch the chariot of the First Emperor passing by. Durrant uses these examples to expound *Shi ji*'s contrasting portrayal of Xiang and Liu.³⁹⁵ Xiang is taken to see the First Emperor, who happen to be on a tour in the region of Kuaiji. This scene reads: "Liang (Xiang Yu's uncle) and Ji (Xiang Yu) are watching this together when Ji says, 'That man can be taken and replaced!' Liang immediately covers Ji's mouth and said, 'Do not speak recklessly. The entire clan will be executed!'" Liu Bang, who witnesses the emperor and his imperial procession on a similar occasion in the Qin capital, Xianyang, has a sharply different reaction. "He (Liu Bang) sighes deeply and says 'Alas, a great man ought to be like this.'"

³⁹⁵ Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 131-32.

Both scenes, placed in the early beginning of the two “Annals,” imply a fundamental difference in the two characters that reverberate throughout the narratives, which I analyze in detail in the next section. While both are ambitious, Xiang is essentially impetuous and reckless, whereas Liu is calm and steady. Their differing words set out a contrast in their personalities. This effect is further strengthened when Xiang and Liang are placed in comparable settings—regardless of whether these scenes really happened.

Shi ji is generous if speeches are helpful for presenting other traits of characters, such as their talent and competence. Su Qin 蘇秦 (?-284) was an influential strategist of the Warring States period. In his biography, his well-designed conversations with other characters occupy most of the space. It is of special interest that his rhetorical speeches vary according to the audience, among whom are the kings of several states, when he visits eight major states, including Qin and Zhou. He tailors and individualizes the lobbying discourses on the basis of their individual circumstances, needs, and desires in order to persuade the kings of six states and bring him seals as the prime minister of these states.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ The historicity of Su Qin has been questioned by many scholars. Henri Maspero, in his article “Le Roman de Sou Ts’in,” claims that the episodes in Su Qin’s biography are not chronological, and concludes that both the alliances and part of this chapter were more fictional and historical. James I. Crump goes further in this respect by dating the vertical alliance against the state of Qin. He also summarizes Chinese view on the reliability of Su Qin’s biography. See Crump’s *Intrigues—Studies of the Chan-kuo ts’u*, 29-30. Yang Kuan, by using both received texts and archeological findings, attempts to restore the historical facts related to Su Qin’s vertical alliance against Qin. See *Zhanguo shi*, 386-88.

Not only central characters, but also peripheral characters are built up by their speeches. In the beginning of Su Qin's biography, we were told that he traveled for several years, hoping to have an opportunity to be employed because of his eloquence. Having experienced tough reality, he returned to his hometown, Luoyang 洛陽, in the state of Eastern Zhou. His older brother, brother-in-law, wife, and concubine(s) all secretly laughed at him and said, "The customs of Zhou people are to manage property, engage in handiwork and business, and to pursue [a profit of] twenty percent. Now you abandoned the foundation, but work with your mouth and tongue. You are stuck and isn't it fitting!" 「周人之俗，治產業，力工商，逐什二以為務。今子釋本而事口舌，困，不亦宜乎！」

This scene is contrasted with a later scene, when Su Qin's status has been dramatically raised. After Su Qin becomes the chief-official of the Vertical Alliance formed by the six states, he passes his home on his way to report to the King of Zhao, with his procession, which makes people suspect a king is passing by. His brothers, wife, and sister-in-law stoop down to attend him with food but do not dare to raise their heads and look forward. Su Qin asks his sister-in-law, "Why were you haughty previously but reverent now?" The sister-in-law crawls to him and prostrates herself, greets him in greatest reverence and apologizes, "My brother's estate is lofty and his wealth great." 嫂

委蛇蒲服，以面掩地而謝曰：「見季子位高金多也。」³⁹⁷ The sharp contrast between the two scenes are mainly produced out of the speeches and movements of characters, revealing their personalities.

In addition, the speech of characters in *Shi ji* are highly personalized, highlighting the unfolding of the plot. It even pays attention to the stammer of Zhou Chang 周昌 (d. 192 B.C.), who was a high official and revered by the emperor, Liu Bang. When Liu Bang intends to depose the Crown Prince, Empress Lü's son, Liu Ying, and replace him with Liu Ruyi, the son by Lady Qi, the great ministers argue vehemently against the move, but none is able to persuade Liu Bang. Zhou Chang is one of the most vehement opponents of the move. Therefore, the emperor asks him to explain his reasons. Zhou Chang stuttered by nature, and on top of this he is very serious at that time. "I cannot get the words out of my mouth," he replies. "But all the time I know it will n-n-never do! Although Your Majesty wishes to remove the Crown Prince, I shall n-n-ever obey such an order!" 「臣口不能言，然臣期期知其不可。陛下雖欲廢太子，臣期期不奉詔。」 The emperor laughs with delight. Empress Lü, who is listening to the proceedings from the eastern wing of the throne room, falls on her knees to thank him. She says, "If it were not for you, the Crown Prince would almost certainly have been dismissed."³⁹⁸ The highly personalized speeches attribute specific traits to characters in the *Shi ji*. These

³⁹⁷ *SJ* 69. 2262.

³⁹⁸ *SJ* 96. 2677.

traits reveal the characters' personalities, talents, physical features, highlighting each character's uniqueness. In addition, they also specify the context in which the historical events happened.

In addition to characters' words, which reveal their traits, in many other cases we see characters comment on their rulers, friends, family, and rivals using highly evaluative words. As I have pointed out in Chapter 4, this technique allows the narrator to present diverse viewpoints on the same issue from various perspectives. It is also to be noted that, in the same chapter and occasionally in other chapters, readers can find clues which respond to these comments. This correspondence not only reduces the narrator's intrusion, but also inspires the reader to evaluate the validity of the comments. It increases the participation of readers and partially explains why these stories are more attractive to readers than didactic histories consisting of dry "facts" and moral lessons. As Goldin points out, in early Chinese histories, facts merely serve to convey the much more important elements, morality.³⁹⁹ In this sense, the "facts" in the *Shi ji* function in a very different way.

The Marquis of Huaiyin, Han Xin 韓信 (230-196 B.C.E.), contributed to the founding of the Han dynasty as an extraordinarily brilliant military leader. He rose from a commoner and could hardly support himself when he was young. In the beginning of his biography, we get to know the protagonist through two characters: a bully on the street

³⁹⁹ Goldin, "Appeals to History," 79-96.

and Xiao He 蕭何 (257-193 B.E.C.), a statesman who plays a crucial role in serving Liu Bang in the Chu-Han confrontation as well as after the founding of the Han.⁴⁰⁰

We are told that a young man among the butchers in Huaiyin jeered at Han Xin: “Even though you are tall and big and love to carry a sword, at heart you are coward.” 「若雖長大，好帶刀劍，中情怯耳。」 In front of a crowd of people, he insulted Han Xin, saying that if Han Xin was not afraid of death, he should come and stab him; if not, then crawl between his legs. Han Xin looked him over carefully, and then bent down and crawled between the man’s legs. The people in the market place all roared with laughter and believed that Han Xin was craven. 「一市人皆笑信，以為怯。」

In contrast, this is not the Han Xin that Xiao He knew. In the early stage of Liu Bang’s rise, many of his soldiers and even generals deserted along the way, because they did not believe that Liu Bang would defeat his stronger rival, Xiang Yu. Han Xin, who waited long enough but failed to attract Liu Bang’s attention, ran away as well. As soon as Xiao He heard of it, he did not wait to report to Liu but ran after him to get him back. After Xiao returned, he explained to Liu that, “Generals are easy enough to get, but men like Han Xin are the best in the kingdom 國士. If Your Majesty aims to rule the area of Hanzhong for a long time, then you have no use of Han Xin’s service; [but] if you intend to contend for mastery of the world, then Han Xin is the only man to make plans with. It

⁴⁰⁰ *SJ* 92. 2609-30.

is entirely a matter of which course you choose to take.”「諸將易得耳。至如信者，國士無雙。王必欲長王漢中，無所事信；必欲爭天下，非信無所與計事者。顧王策安所決耳。」⁴⁰¹

The reader learns about the protagonist through the comments of the bully and Xiao He, which is an indirect way to attach traits to a character. It is noted that these comments about the same character are controversial, because the bully and Xiao He had different opinions of Han Xin's personality. This means that one of them was wrong and his comments on Han Xin were invalid. Reading the rest of the chapter, one needs to be alert about other episodes and use them to judge whose comments are valid. By posing conflicting evaluations from other related characters to the reader, the text draws readers in and enhances their participation in processing the text. They are no longer passive audience of episodes, but active participants in decoding and interpreting the text.

5.2.2 Characterization in *Zuo zhuan*

Zuo zhuan also includes many speeches attributed to various characters, but they differ from those of *Shi ji* in several respects. Many speeches in *Zuo zhuan* do not have the function of characterization, because they are not about the character himself or herself, nor another character in a conversation or event. Instead, these speeches are usually comments on a specific action or behavior according to rituals and morality. The

⁴⁰¹ *SJ* 92. 2611.

characters are just like puppets. They say what the author wants them to say. Readers cannot attach any trait to a character, resulting in *Zuo Zhuan*'s much lower level of characterization in general. Although characters speak frequently in *Zuo zhuan*, sometimes even in speeches encompassing several lines, the reader is not able to learn more about the speaker, nor the one whom the speaker judges. Instead, by focusing on didactic principles, the text trains the reader to be familiar with repeated patterns: actions contrary to ritual or morality lead to bad outcomes; the mandate of Heaven should be followed; otherwise inauspicious events will happen. These patterns are integrated into the descriptions of battles, transactions and competition between powers, and reinforced by dreams and divinations, which always predict things accurately.⁴⁰²

In the *Zuo zhuan*, *li* 禮 is a central philosophical concept, which it usually integrates into speeches. "Characters develop the notion of *li* as a system that organizes human behavior and links it to the natural workings of cosmos."⁴⁰³ Actions against *li* lead to serious issues. A famous example of careful naming involves two sons of Lord Mu of Jin. His crown prince was born during the battle against the Tiao barbarians, but the other younger son was born when the Battle of Qianmu broke out. The lord then named the former Chou 仇 (enemy) and the latter Chengshi 成師 (forming an army). But Chou can also mean "parity," which suggests that Chou and Chengshi have equal claims to

⁴⁰² Li Wai-yee discusses the causality set up through signs in the *Zuo zhuan* in her *Readability of the Past*. She examines various form of predications and their fulfillments. Yuri Pine analyzes the divine authority in his *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, 55-88.

⁴⁰³ Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 159.

rulership. This prediction by the official, Shifu, was fulfilled in the chaos in the 24th year of Lord Hui of Lu (744 B.C.). It reads:

初，晉穆侯之夫人姜氏，以條之役生太子，命之曰仇，其弟以千畝之戰生，命之曰成師。師服曰，異哉君之名子也，夫名以制義，義以出禮，禮以體政，政以正民，是以政成而民聽，易則生亂，嘉耦曰妃，怨耦曰仇，古之命也，今君命太子曰仇，弟曰成師，始兆亂矣，兄其替乎，惠之二十四年，晉始亂。⁴⁰⁴

Sometime earlier, the wife of Lord Mu of Jin, Lady Jiang, gave birth to the Crown Prince at the time of Battle of Tiao. [The lord] named him Chou. His brother was born at the time of Battle of Qianmu. [The lord] named him Chengshi. Shifu said, “How weirdly has the lord named his sons! Names are to regulate righteousness; righteousness is to be represented in rituals; rituals are to embody government; government is to correct people. Therefore, when the government is completed, the people will follow; changes would engender chaos. Good partners are called *fei*; resentful consorts are called *chou*. These are the ancient naming [practices]. Now the lord named the Crown Prince Chou and his brother Chengshi. It is an omen of chaos at the beginning. Will the older brother be replaced?” In the 24th year of Lord Hui, Jin’s chaos commenced.

Other notations such as *de* 德 (virtue) and *tian* 天 (Heaven) often appear in dialogues, too. Lord Xian of Jin bribed to the ruler of Yu 虞 in order to gain access to and defeat the state of Guo 虢. Gong Zhiqi 宮之奇, a minister of Yu, remonstrated with his ruler that it was not virtuous to let Jin gain access to Guo. He said,

鬼神非人實親，惟德是依，故《周書》曰：「皇天無親，惟德是輔」，又曰：「黍稷非馨，明德惟馨」，又曰：「民不易物，惟德絜物。」如是則非德，民不和，神不享矣。神所馮依，將在德矣，若晉取虞，而明德以薦馨香，神其吐之乎。⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ ZZ, Huang 2.8, 91-93.

⁴⁰⁵ ZZ, Xi 5.8, 309-10.

The ghosts and spirits are not intimate with humans; they stand by virtue alone. That is why the *Zhou Documents* says,

“High heaven is not intimate with any one,
Assisting only virtue.”

And again,

“Millet grains are not fragrant,
Bright virtue alone is fragrant.”

And again,

“The people cannot change the offering,
Virtue alone is the offering.”

So it is that without virtue, the people will not be in harmony and the spirits will not imbibe the offerings. What the spirits will depend on and follow is virtue. If Jin conquers Yu and in its bright virtue offers fragrant sacrifices, will the spirits spit them out?⁴⁰⁶

Tian is often associated with the rise or decline of a character or a state in a speech, and it influences subsequent decisions. For example, the rise of Chong'er, the later Lord Wen of Jin, was connected to Heaven several times. The state of Jin or Chong'er favor by Heaven partially determines the reactions of a few rulers when Chong'er was in exile. In the 23rd year of Lord Xi of Lu, Lord Wen fled to the state of Qi, where he received a friendly and generous reception.

When Chong'er and his followers arrived in Chu, King Cheng of Chu (d. 626), decided to send Chong'er to Qin. One of his reasons is that “The Ji lineage are the descendants of Tangshu. Will their decline start from the sons of Lord Xian? If Heaven is prospering Jin, who could vanquish it? Disobeying Heaven, Jin would make a big mistake. Therefore, Jin sent him to Qin.” 吾聞姬姓，唐叔之後，其後衰者也，其將由

⁴⁰⁶ Translation is from Li Wai-yee in *The Readability of the Past*, 206.

晉公子乎，天將興之，誰能廢之，違天必有大咎，乃送諸秦⁴⁰⁷ With the help of Lord Mu of Qin, Chong'er successfully ascended the throne. In this process, his attitude of Chu is so important that it changed the life-track of Chong'er.

The comparisons above shows that personalized speeches integrated into detailed contexts are of great help in building up vivid characters. *Shi ji* uses both the character's own speeches and supporting role-players speeches, direct and indirectly attach traits to a character.

5.3 The Importance of Reading Order

Shi ji portrays numerous vivid characters. In addition to its well-designed and context-fitting speeches, *Shiji* attaches traits to characters following in an order that makes each chapter an organic unit. This ordering not only enables the reader to see the repeated elements throughout the characterization process, but also makes character development possible. Therefore, reading order is an important issue. Among the extant historical writings, *Shi ji* is the first work in which reading order matters. For other earlier historical works, such as *Shang shu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, or *Guo yu* 國語, it does not matter which chapter one starts with, or which page one starts with.

⁴⁰⁷ ZZ Xi 23.6, 409.

Yuri Pines traces the usage of keywords *li* 禮 in the *Zuo zhuan* and finds that its connotation changes over the course of the text, indicating that this work could not have been written all at once in the fourth century B.C.. Therefore, he argues that *Zuo zhuan* is a reliable source for *Chunqiu*-era intellectual history. In this argument, the fact that the usage of *li* changes over time is a significant hint to help in dating the work; however, this does not mean that a reader has to follow the exact order of *Zuo zhuan* to understand its meanings. Instead, each entry is a complete unit of narration.

Shang shu is primarily a collection of addresses of kings or ministers, regardless of its two different textual traditions, called “Ancient Script” and “Modern Script.” In both schemes, the arrangement of the text follows a chronological order, corresponding to the four earliest periods of Chinese history, Yu 虞, Xia 夏, Shang 商, and Zhou 周.⁴⁰⁸ *Zuo Zhuan*, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, follows a chronological sequence and its entries are arranged according to the Lu calendar, which is based on the reigns of its twelve rulers. Since narratives about the major states are put into such a framework, it is common to find events of various states within one entry. It also leads to the discontinuity of major events whose causes and consequences in the long run extend over more than one year.

⁴⁰⁸ Loewe, *Early Chinese Text*, 376-77. This chronological order is in a mythical sense because the early sagely kings before the Xia are legendary ages.

Like *Zuo zhuan*, *Guo yu* also takes the form of narrative to represent the past while its principle aim is to record discourses. It has twenty-one *juan* in eight sections, whose themes are eight major states correspondingly, including, Zhou 周, Lu 魯, Qi 齊, Jin 晉, Zheng 鄭, Chu 楚, Wu 吳, Yue 越. For each state the material is arranged chronologically.⁴⁰⁹ Each *juan* is a collection of events concerning a state and there is no cause-and-effect relationship among the events, although occasionally they may share a common subject.

One common feature of these works is that their narrative units are quite short and there are no connections established among these units. (By “unit,” I mean a certain length of the text whose meaning is complete.) In other words, when readers finish one section of language signs, they can stop, because the previous or following part next to the unit no longer connects with the finished part. For *Shang shu*, a unit is a chapter. Although in the tradition of “Modern Script,” “Yao dian” 堯典 and “Shun dian” 舜典 are next to each other, they are two units because they do not have inner connections. For *Zuo zhuan*, in the first year of Lord Yin’s reign (722-712), which is placed at the very beginning of the work, there are seven entries corresponding to the seven entries in the *Chun qiu*. The narrative about Lord Zhuang of Zheng, who conquered his younger

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 264. See 3. A Brief Introduction of *Chunqiu*, *Zuo zhuan* and *Guo yu* in the Introduction chapter, 31.

brother at Yan, is a separate unit.⁴¹⁰ It has nothing to do with the previous one, which is about forming an alliance with the neighboring state of Zhu 邾, nor the following one, which is about King Ping of Zhou's sending a funerary chariot to Lu. One may argue that an event in *Zuo zhuan* is frequently linked with earlier events by *chu* 初. However, *chu* in cases like this is just an indicator used to introduce new materials, rather than a cross-reference directing the reader to another entry in the work. Similarly, as Loewe notes, one feature of *Guo yu* is that "Each item that is recorded is independent and complete in itself, without being linked to other times."⁴¹¹ Because of the structure these works, although their contents follow a chronological order, it does not matter which chapter or page one starts with. Even within the same chapter, one can randomly pick one entry/item and then either stop or go on to any other entry.

In addition to the historical works, the principle of flexible reading order also applies to canonical works in other genres, such as the anthology, *Shijing* 詩經, and philosophical works. Although the contents of *Analects*, *Mencius* 孟子, *Laozi* 老子, and *Xunzi* 荀子 are interconnected, one does not need to read them in any particular sequence.

Yet this is not the case of *Shi ji*, whose episodes about events are not only organically interconnected, but also follow a logical order. While they are arranged in a

⁴¹⁰ See the story of Lord Zhuang of Zheng in 4.1 Duration and Its Types, 197-99.

⁴¹¹ Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts*, 264.

general chronological order, like the works analyzed previously, one cannot randomly start reading with any particular piece. Once the chapter is fixed, one has to start from the very beginning to understand the entire chapter because earlier episodes or background information contribute to or account for the protagonist's reactions to later events in his or her life. The logical connections and coherence among episodes within one chapter outweigh the importance of pure chronological order.⁴¹²

“The Biography of Lü Buwei” 呂不韋列傳 is a well-designed chapter. One needs to follow the sequence of the chapter to read the episodes, which follow a chronological order and are interlocked. The psychological portraits play a crucial role in forming a thread to explain Lü Buwei's plans, actions, and speeches. This is not found in *Shi ji*'s predecessors.

The protagonist, Lü Buwei (d. 235), is a wealthy merchant who did business in Handan 邯鄲, the capital of Zhao. Zichu's 子楚 (281-247) father is a prince of Qin who has been chosen as the heir. However, Zichu, as one of the more than twenty sons, fails to get attention from his father and has no chance of succeeding him. He has been sent to Handan as a hostage years earlier and is treated badly by the state of Zhao because the Qin frequently attacks the border of Zhao. The first meeting between Lü Buwei and Zichu is so crucial that both their lives are dramatically changed, because an ingenious

⁴¹² Sometimes a chronological order suggests the logical connection between two episodes next to each other. See 3.3.1 Chronological Order, 126.

and workable plan is implemented afterwards. The excerpt below shows how Lü becomes interested in the poor prince at the very beginning.

子楚，秦諸庶孽孫，質於諸侯，車乘進用不饒，居處困，不得意。呂不韋賈邯鄲，見而憐之，曰「此奇貨可居」。乃往見子楚，說曰：「吾能大子之門。」子楚笑曰：「且自大君之門，而乃大吾門！」呂不韋曰：「子不知也，吾門待子門而大。」子楚心知所謂，乃引與坐，深語。⁴¹³

Zichu was one of the grandsons of [King Qin] from the lineage of a concubine. He was sent as a hostage to one of other states. His carriages and other equipment were poorly provided. He had to live in in straitened circumstances, and was not able to do as he pleased. Lü Buwei was doing business in Handan.

He saw Zichu, sympathized with him, and said, "This is a rare piece of merchandise to put in storage." He then went to meet Zichu, saying "I know how to enlarge your gate for you!"

Zichu laughed and said, "You'd better enlarge your own gate before you enlarge mine."

Lü Buwei said, "You do not understand. The enlarging of my gate depends on the enlargement of yours!" Zichu, heartily understanding what [he] referred to, then guided and seated him, and started a deep conversation.

In this scene, the psychological word *lian* 憐 (sympathize) informs the reader of Lü's original feelings about Zichu: the former sympathized with the latter. Lü considers Zichu a *qihuo* 奇貨, rare piece of goods, revealing that he sensed, with his keen eyes as a successful businessman, opportunities in this poor and hopeless prince. *Nai* 乃 (therefore) highlights the logical connection between Lü's words and his following action, to meet and talk to Zichu. This line by Lü is not part of a conversation and we do not know who the audience is. Although it appears as a short speech in the text, it serves to inform the

⁴¹³ SJ 85. 2507.

reader of Lü's thoughts. Watson has pointed out that speech is one of the literary devices of *Shi ji*. I would argue that Lü's *qihuo* comment about Zichu triggers the entire plan of assisting Zichu to become the inheritor of his father and for Lü to get enormous benefits in the same process. These rewards that Lü received in turn influenced the rest of his life.

After Lü's and Zichu's in-depth discussion, which contributes to mutual understanding and reliance, Lü Buwei started his adventure from two aspects at the same time. On the one hand, he sponsored Zichu with a large amount of money for him to get along with *binke* 賓客 (literally "guests")⁴¹⁴ and get support from them.⁴¹⁵ On the other hand, he invested a large fortune in persuading Lady Huayang, who was favored by Zichu's father but had borne no sons, to install Zichu as the heir. Again, a win-win alliance is set up: Lady Huayang persuaded her husband to set up Zichu as the heir; Zichu promised that Lady Huayang would be the empress-dowager after he had succeeded his father and become the King of Qin. As planned, Zichu finally became the king; he was known as King Zhuangxiang (r. 249-247 BC) and Lady Huayang also achieved her goal. King Zhuangxiang appointed Lü as the chancellor, enfeoffed him as the Marquis of Wenxin with the revenue from a hundred thousand households in Henan and Luoyang.

⁴¹⁴ Rulers and powerful courtiers in the Warring States period had large number of retainers. They seek patronage by being the patron's teachers and private advisors.

⁴¹⁵ Visitors from various states aiming to get political benefits for their employers. They usually gathered together in places of political importance such as big cities.

As I analyzed in Chapter 4, Lü had a beautiful dancing girl, who was already been pregnant with his baby.⁴¹⁶ The baby grew into a boy called Ying Zheng 嬴政, who succeeded his father as the king of Qin and later set himself up as the First Emperor (*shi huang di* 始皇帝) after his unification of China.⁴¹⁷ When drinking with Lü, Zichu saw her and was pleased by her. He instantly requested her from Lü. The reader was told that Lü was furious at first but soon agreed, because he thought of the fact that he had invested all his wealth in assisting Zichu to ascend the throne and his intention was to *diaoqi* 釣奇 (angle for marvelous prize). This episode is a development of Lü and Zichu's first meeting, which also includes *qi* 奇 (marvelous) as in the keyword *qihuo* 奇貨. If one imagines a reader just starting from this point, he or she would not be able to understand the deep meaning of *qi* without referring to the earlier meeting episode.

This episode not only relates to the first meeting between Lü and Zichu, but also results in serious consequences after Lü reaches the peak of his life. King Zhuangxiang rules for three years and dies. The affair between Lü and the previous dancing girl, now the Queen Dowager of Qin, continues after the succession of Ying Zheng. Lü is *kong* 恐 (afraid) of being discovered. This psychological situation made him find a lover named Lao Ai 嫪毐 (?-238 B.C.) for the Queen Dowager to replace himself and save him from

⁴¹⁶ See 4.3.2.1 Psychological Descriptions, 240-42.

⁴¹⁷ It is only told in this chapter in *Shi ji*. In the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor," it was not mentioned. Most scholars believe that Sima's statement is not based on historical fact.

trouble. In order to send Lao Ai into the palace, Lü disguised him as a fake eunuch. The result is that this illicit affair is uncovered and it leads to Lü's dismissal from his post as Chancellor, but he is able to retain his title as Marquis of Wenxin because of his enormous contribution to King Zhuangxiang's enthronement and numerous intercessions from officials. As a result, Lü is sent to his own fief.⁴¹⁸

Unfortunately, in a year or so, Lü's final collapse was caused by his great political influence and potential threat to the king. At that time, it was popular for various lords, who were aristocrats but willing to humble themselves before others, to have followers. The famous well-known patrons include Tian Wen 田文 (Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君, d. 279), Huang Xie 黃歇 (Lord Chunshen 春申君, d. 238), Zhao Sheng (Lord Pingyuan 平原君, d. 251), and Wei Wuji (Lord Xinling 信陵君, d. 243). The patron's ability to attract retainers depends on their power, wealth, and proximity to the court. Again through psychological portraiture, we learn that Lü *felt* disgraced that the powerful Qin did not to do likewise. Therefore, after he became the Chancellor of Qin, he had thousands of followers and organized them to compile *The Springs and Autumns of Master Lü*. Any wandering scholars or retainers of various lords who could add or delete one word would be awarded 1000 gold coins.

This episode about the magnificent project paves the way for the later one: after his removal from the chancellorship, many followers and envoys of various lords came to

⁴¹⁸ For more discussion, see Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, 75-85.

call on him, arousing Ying Zheng's anxiety and suspicion about a potential rebellion. Finally, the King wrote Lü a letter in which he criticized the mismatch between the exceeding benefits that Lü enjoyed from Qin and his limited contribution to the state. The King exiled him and his family to the Shu area. Reading the letter, Lü reflected and committed suicide.

In the biography, Lü Buwei's life is presented in twelve episodes. I summarize and list them below.

- 1: Lü Buwei meets and plots with Zichu;
- 2: Lü Buwei persuades Lady Huayang to install Zichu.
- 3: The First Emperor is born.
- 4: Zichu returns to Qin with the help of Lü Buwei
- 5: Zichu is installed as the crown heir.
- 6: Zichu becomes the King Zhuangxiang of Qin and appoints Lü Buwei as the chancellor.
- 7: Ying Zheng enthrones as the King of Qin and Lü Buwei serves as the prime minister.
- 8: Lü Buwei organizes the compilation *The Spring and Autumn of Master Lü*
- 9: Lü Buwei recommends Lao Ai to the Empress Dowager.
- 10: Lao Ai's rebellious plan is discovered and his lineage is executed by Ying Zheng.

11: Lü Buwei is sent to his fief.

12: Lü Buwei commits suicide by poisoning himself.

While these events are generally presented chronologically, the logical connections among them are more important than the chronological order. Indeed, their logical relations are so close that if one starts reading from the middle or the end, one would certainly have trouble understanding later events. In Episode 1, When Lü and Zichu met for the first time, Lü considered Zichu *qihuo* 奇貨 “a rare piece of goods,” but this time the goods was not stuff but a person of political importance who had the potential to bring enormous benefits, including not only money but also power. The transaction was a trade in the politics: giving and taking in Qin. At the end of this episode, Lü’s goal is explicitly stated: “The enlargement of my gate depends on the enlargement of yours!” Episode 1, located at the beginning of the biography, serves as the foundation for one to understand and interpret any later episodes. With Zichu’s ascendance to the throne described in Episode 6, Lü obtained extraordinary benefits, political status, and power from his earlier investment. If one were to start from Episode 6, one would not be able to see how Lü gained the status, wealth, and position, let alone to perceive these benefits as a return on an investment.

This chapter tells us about the anxiety of the king: guests from various states went to visit Lü and the King of Qin was afraid that he rebelled. [諸侯賓客使者相望於道，請文信侯。秦王恐其為變]. However, if one has skipped Event 8, one may ask why Lü

was popular among the literate people. In order to compete with the four lords in other states who housed many talented retainers, Lü started his book project, *The Spring and Autumn of Master Lü*, which directly resulted in his death. The participation of thousands of talented guests in this book-project surely transmitted Lü's fame. Therefore, without Event 8, the reader would not understand Lü's standing in the intellectual world.

5.4 Coherence and Development of the Character

Most narratives in *Shi ji* reveal one or two major characteristics of the protagonists. Successful and realistic characters must have traits of coherence, that is, constant characteristics without irrational conflicts within the same character. As I discussed in the section 5.1, this coherence is accomplished through repeated elements suggested by a series of episodes. This strategy is used in many chapters in the *Shi ji*.⁴¹⁹ This coherence is different from the Chinese concept of *fubi* 伏筆 (a hint foreshadowing later developments or an anticipatory remark in a story), because the latter is actually a preparation for later plot development, and does not necessarily imply a repeated element. The coherence of a personality may be established either through parallel simultaneous episodes or episodes in a chronological sequence.

⁴¹⁹ Some examples include the chapters focusing on Xiang Yu, Liu Bang, and Chen She. For a study of the relationship between coherence and meaning in the *Zuo zhuan*, see Ron, "Narratives in the Tso chuan," 1977.

In the previous example, Lü Buwei's collapse at the end was not due to one single event; rather, he crumbled in several respects. His successful investment brought him political power (achieved in Event 6 & 7), wealth (achieved in Event 6 & 7), fame (achieved in Event 8), and even the Empress Dowager's favor (achieved in Event 9), which are various aspects of his overall goal: enlarging his own gate. The coherence of his personality is his ambition.

By character development, I refer to the arch of character that is achieved in the course of narration. In other words, the character is not the same from the beginning to the end because it develops. A balance between coherence and character development is built into the *Shi ji*. The best example is "The Biography of Li Si" 李斯 (ca. 280-208), who was born to a commoner family in the state of Chu and became the chancellor of the state of Qin and later the Qin Empire after the First Emperor's unification of China in 221 B.C.E.⁴²⁰ While "our view of Li Si is inevitably colored by Sima Qian, who notwithstanding his deserved fame as a historian, incorporated into his writings a peculiar view of the empire and its legitimacy,"⁴²¹ this section focuses on the textual structure in order to examine the characterization of Li Si.

I divide Li Si's life into two parts. Before the death of the First Emperor in 210 BC, he rose dramatically from a minor official in the state of Chu and reached his peak by serving the First Emperor as the chancellor of the Qin Empire; after that, he declined

⁴²⁰ *SJ* 87.

⁴²¹ Goldin, *After Confucius*, 66.

radically and was put to death. When he was young, he saw rats at his workplace and commented on them. Placed at the beginning part of his biography, this episode reads:

見吏舍廁中鼠食不絜，近人犬，數驚恐之。斯入倉，觀倉中鼠，食積粟，居大廡之下，不見人犬之憂。於是李斯乃嘆曰：「人之賢不肖譬如鼠矣，在所自處耳！」乃從荀卿學帝王之術。⁴²²

He saw that the rats in the latrines and the functionaries' quarters ate refuse and would be terrified whenever people or dogs approached. When [Li] Si entered the granary, he observed that the rats in the granary ate mounds of grain and, living under a great portico, were not bothered by people or dogs. Therefore Si sighed and said: "People are worthy or ignoble just like rats: [one's fate] depends on where one is located!"

The first episode about Li Si in his biography, through his observation and the comparison of the contrasting living environment of rats, reveals his insight that the placement of oneself in a circumstance determines what one can get. His reflection on the rats soon led to his decision to study *diwang zhi shu* 帝王之術 (techniques of an emperor or king) with Xunzi 荀子 (? 313-238 B.C.E.), aiming to change his current humble status. The cause-and-effect is reinforced by the conjunction, *nai* 乃 (therefore), which is put right after the first episode to connect with his study with Xunzi: 乃從荀卿學帝王之術.⁴²³ After he completed his studies, we were told that he decided to go to Qin instead of his native state, Chu. Because his goal was to realize his ambition, the mighty Qin certainly offered more opportunities than other contemporary weaker states. This is the

⁴²² Translated by Goldin, Ibid, 66. SJ 87. 2539.

⁴²³ SJ 87, 2540.

first application of his theory of the decisive role of one's circumstances. Before he left his master, he said:

斯聞得時無怠，今萬乘方爭時，游者主事。今秦王欲吞天下，稱帝而治，此布衣馳騫之時而游說者之秋也。處卑賤之位而計不為者，此禽鹿視肉，人面而能閒行者耳。故詬莫大於卑賤，而悲莫甚於窮困。久處卑賤之位，困苦之地，非世而惡利，自託於無為，此非士之情也。故斯將西說秦王矣。

I have heard that if one gets the opportunity, one should not be idle. Now is the time when [the states] of 10,000 chariots are vying for power, when the wandering schoolman can take command of affairs. Currently, the King of Qin wants to swallow up the world, to call himself emperor and rule it. [Therefore,] this is the moment for commoners to gallop toward him and good timing for the lobbyists to [achieve their goals]. [If] one occupies a lowly and humble position but does not plan for advancement [at this moment], one is like a bird or beast that spies a piece of meat but can only force itself to walk away because there are people around. Therefore, there is no greater disgrace than being lowly and humble, and no greater sorrow than poverty and want. Being in a lowly and humble position and in a situation of hardship and trial for a long time, but condemning the age, speaking ill of gain, and entrusting in inaction—this is not the character/disposition/temperament of a gentleman. Therefore, I will go to the west and speak to the King of Qin.⁴²⁴

In his view of the late Warring States era, Li Si also emphasized his second theory of success: timing. Interrelated with his theory of circumstances, it refers to one's ability to seize the moment and take action. In this farewell speech, he connected the two theories and indicated his bold belief in pursuit of fame and profit. It is also noted that the two theories are interconnected because timing is one of the significant factors relating to one's success in the form of power and status. These are further related to material prosperity, which Li Si directly and frankly referred to in the above speeches.

⁴²⁴ SJ 87, 2539-40.

After his arrival in Qin, and with the help of Lü Buwei, Li Si was able to persuade the king that it was now the time to unify China. He argued that earlier generations of Qin kings could not achieve this goal, because each state took turns as hegemons; now, these states were weaker than Qin, so that it was the right time for Qin. Moreover, if the king could not seize this moment, other states would become strong again. In short, this single moment was the kind of opportunity that rarely appears in ten thousand generations. Li, by using his theory of timing, aroused King's ambition to "complete the enterprise of an emperor" 成帝業.⁴²⁵

Later, in 237 BC, Li Si encountered his first big political challenge. Anxiety about all the foreigners living in Qin was aroused by the discovery of a spy from Han. Of course, as a native of Chu, Li was one of those foreigners who were about to be banished. He wrote a memorial to the king to respond to the irrational decree. This memorial uses many metaphors and examples to argue against the decree in two pragmatic respects: previous kings employed talented foreigners to make contributions to the Qin, and the wonders and treasures that the king liked all came from outside of Qin. Li's argument was so powerful that the king finally removed the decree and foreigners in Qin were able to stay.

It is noted that these two respects are both materialistic. One is related to the king's career and ambitious political plan of unifying the world; the other involves the

⁴²⁵ *SJ* 87, 2540.

king's desire for concubines, treasures, horses, and so on. While these perspectives may have been chosen by Li to serve his purpose of persuading the king, more important is that, from another perspective, this memorial, just like speeches, actions, and psychological portraits discussed previously, also functions to attach traits to Li Si's character. In other words, as an example of Li's writing, the memorial reveals his own thoughts. It must not be a coincidence that political ambition and material desire, which can be satisfied through advancing one's career, are perfectly in line with Li Si's principles. He had explicitly expressed his pursuit of wealth and power when he left his master, Xunzi. Keeping previous theories of Li in mind, one would not be surprised to see such a memorial by him. The coherence of his pursuit of prosperity is realized by repeating this characteristic in his writing, in addition to previous episodes.

For about twenty years, Li Si assisted the king with the ambitious plan they had made together. With the First Emperor's unification of China in 221 BC, Li Si reached the peak of his power as he became the chancellor of the Qin Empire and all his children married those of the First Emperor. From serving as a minor official in Chu to becoming the powerful chancellor, by seizing the moment and locating himself in the Qin court, he realized his ambition. Seeing thousands of chariots carrying enormous numbers of officials come to his drinking party, Li expressed his anxiety about the future:

嗟乎！吾聞之荀卿曰「物禁大盛」。夫斯乃上蔡布衣，閭巷之黔首，上不知其驚下，遂擢至此。當今人臣之位無居臣上者，可謂富貴極矣。物極則衰，吾未知所稅駕也！⁴²⁶

Alas! I have heard Xunzi say, "Do not let things flourish too greatly." I wore a commoner's clothes at Shangcai; I was an ordinary subject from the lanes and alleyways, The emperor did not realized that his nag was inferior, so he raised me to this [position]. No one with a ministerial position occupies a post higher than mine; one can call this the pinnacle of wealth and honor. When things reach their pinnacle, they decline. I do not yet know where my carriage will be halted.⁴²⁷

In this premonition, Li Si's anxiety about losing the power and fortune for which he had striven for decades is obvious. This is the turning-point which initiates the second part of life, because from then on his goal would become maintaining the prosperity that he enjoyed instead of realizing his ambition further. This premonition scene is particularly crucial from two opposite perspectives. One is that it marks that the characterization will go in a different direction, craftily allowing this change and achieving character development. The other perspective is that, despite the reversal, the second half of this biography still focuses on Li's principles about circumstance and timing, making his traits still coherent. Therefore, the coherence and development of Li Si are in balance.

In 211 BC, the First Emperor made his fifth circuit through the empire, accompanied by his younger son Huhai 胡亥 (230-207 BC), Li Si, and Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 208 B.C.), a eunuch who was the Superintendent of the Imperial Carriage House but

⁴²⁶ *SJ* 87. 2547.

⁴²⁷ Goldin, *After Confucius*, 72.

was also acting as the Superintendent for Imperial Seals.⁴²⁸ The First Emperor's oldest son, Fusu 扶蘇 (?-210), had been sent to the northern border with General Meng Tian 蒙恬 (?-210) and his troops, because he had repeatedly criticized his father for denigrating Confucius. In the seventh month of that year, the First Emperor fell deathly ill at Shaqiu 沙丘. He dictated a letter to Fusu, commanding him to return to the capital with Meng Tian's troops, implying that Fusu would be his successor. But the emperor expired before the sealed letter was given to a messenger. Therefore, it was in the hands of Zhao Gao, who was in charge of imperial seals. Since Li Si decided to keep the death of the First Emperor secret, only a few eunuchs knew of the matter. This circumstance gave Zhao Gao a perfect opportunity to choose the successor of the empire. In need of the consensus of both Huhai and Li Si, Zhao took action to persuade them.⁴²⁹

Although Li argued against Zhao several times, he was finally persuaded by Zhao and agreed to cooperate with him. The conversation between Zhao and Li comes at an extremely important moment and occupies a large part of the biography, which suggests the importance of these exchanges. In addition, as the most powerful man in the empire now, how Li Si gave up his stand and followed a eunuch's plan deserves particular

⁴²⁸ Huhai later succeeded the First Emperor and was known as the Second Emperor (r. 210-207 B.C.)

⁴²⁹ Zhao Gao had served and taught Huhai secretly. Therefore, he must have known that "Huhai was a foolish and malleable lordling. He encouraged the young prince to seize the throne for himself, hinting darkly that the empire would not rebel if Fusu were to be assassinated." See Goldin's *After Confucius*, 73.

attention, because it is a crucial part of *Shi ji*'s characterization of Li. My examination shows that Zhao's process of persuasion can be divided into two parts according to his core arguments, which exactly correspond to Li's own theories, material prosperity and timing, extracted from the two episodes I analyzed previously.

When Zhao implied his proposal of replacing the heir, Li instantly stopped him and firmly told him that his words were *wangguo zhi yan* 亡國之言 (nation-destroying speech) and that this issue was inappropriate for a ruler's subject to discuss. However, when Zhao asked Li to compare himself with Meng Tian in five respects: abilities, achievements, schemes, resentment from people, and the trust of Fusu, Li became much less assertive and admitted that he could not compete with Meng in any of them. Zhao then went further by connecting the issue of succession with Li's personal welfare. He bluntly reminded Li that all of previous chancellors of Qin were executed, and that if Fusu ascended the throne, he would undoubtedly appoint Meng to replace Li, and that therefore Li would not even be able to return home.

Zhao then moved on to relate the issue of succession to Li's own gains and losses by saying that safety could turn into a danger, or vice versa. Li argued that he could not betray the emperor, who had promoted him from a commoner to the empire's chancellor and entrusted him with state affairs. But we clearly see Li's irresolution when he says, "I beg you to say no more of this, or you will force me to commit a crime!" Zhao responded in two ways to Li's concerns about the possible disaster that changing the successor

might bring. One is that sages follow the times. So in this case, as long as you are accord with Huhai, who was the superior, things would endure for a long time. The other is that Li's participation would enable his descendants retain high status and prosperity. In contrast, if he refused, disasters would come. Finally, Li gave up his stand. He looked at heaven and sighed in sorrow, saying, "Alas, I alone should face such troubled times! I failed to die when I should have—now what fate can I hope for?"

In this episode, we see Li Si's original efforts to debate with Zhao Gao. He originally intended to be a loyal minister to repay the Emperor and he was fully aware of the disasters that the empire might have to face in the future if he followed Zhao to enthrone Huhai as the new emperor. However, as we discussed previously, material prosperity, which is closely related to one's circumstance and the ability to seize the moment, had been Li Si's principle of success. Therefore, Zhao repeatedly lobbied from the perspective of Li's own concerns, resulting in Li's hesitation and inability to insist on his original righteous thoughts. Finally, Zhao contrasted the remarkable difference that Li's decision would bring to himself and his family: either being kings for generations if he cooperates with Zhao, or calamities reaching not only himself but also his descendants if he does not. Zhao's threats led to the collapse of Li Si's stance.

The conspiracy of Zhao, Li, and Huhai succeeded. Huhai became the Second Emperor, and used every method to cater to his overwhelming desire, including national projects, such as the construction of Epang Palace and the highway system. Manipulated

by Zhao, the Second Emperor executed many of his siblings and influential officials in order to secure his legitimacy. Facing the chaos, Li Si tried to remonstrate but was not permitted to meet the emperor. Later, the Second Emperor even argued against Li Si at length; his main point was that the virtuous should use all available resources to satisfy one's desire. At that time, Li Si's son, Li You 李由, who was the governor of the Sanchuan district, failed to stop the attacks by Chen She's rebel troops. The emperor criticized both Li Si and his son. The reader is told that Li was afraid of losing his title and stipend. Therefore, he presented a fawning memorial to the emperor. Here again we learn that Li Si gave up his stand because of his avarice.

Soon Zhao blocked communication between the emperor and ministers and exclusively controlled the court. In order to remove Li Si, he fabricated Li Si's rebellion. Being put in prison, Li Si again looked at the sky and sighed deeply. He compared himself to three well-known loyal ministers, Guanlong Feng, Bigan, and Wu Zixu and the Second Emperor to their rulers, Jie, Zhou, and Fuchai, respectively. He commented that he would die because of his *zhong* 忠 (loyalty) to the emperor. Hoping to remind the emperor and save himself, Li listed a series of contributions to Qin in a memorial. Unfortunately, it was intercepted by Zhao. Both Li and Li You were sentenced to death. Before the execution, he said to his son "I wish you and I could take our brown dog and

go out through the eastern gate of Shangcai to chase the crafty hare. But how would we be able to do it!” (吾欲與若復牽黃犬俱出上蔡東門逐狡兔，豈可得乎！)⁴³⁰

In this death scene, this line expresses Li Si's regret. His pathos implies that he finally gave up his principles about material prosperity and timing. From the ambitious and cunning opportunist at the beginning to the prisoner who would like to quit fame and power, the character development of Li Si is achieved. Of course, this is only regret but not reflection. His eagerness for wealth and power are rooted in his philosophy. It is true that, by following it, he obtained fame and wealth; but ironically, he was also destroyed by it, from the moment when he decided to join in the conspiracy with Huhai and Zhao Gao. From Li Si's rise to decline, we see both coherence and development in the characterization process of this character.

5.5 Predictability of Characters and Events

Is the world predictable? Is there a pattern that the world follows? Are the wicked punished and the worthy rewarded? By predictability, I mean that the outcome of an event follows a fixed pattern, making the outcome foreseeable. These questions are crucial for human beings to be able to understand the past and act in the future. *Shi ji* has a specific discussion of this issue.

⁴³⁰ *SJ* 81. 2562.

或曰：「天道無親，常與善人。」若伯夷、叔齊，可謂善人者非邪？積仁絜行如此而餓死！且七十子之徒，仲尼獨薦顏淵為好學。然回也屢空，糟糠不厭，而卒蚤夭。天之報施善人，其何如哉？盜跖日殺不辜，肝人之肉，暴戾恣睢，聚黨數千人橫行天下，竟以壽終。是遵何德哉？此其尤大彰明較著者也。若至近世，操行不軌，專犯忌諱，而終身逸樂，富厚累世不絕。或擇地而蹈之，時然後出言，行不由徑，非公正不發憤，而遇禍災者，不可勝數也。余甚惑焉，儻所謂天道，是邪非邪？⁴³¹

Some people say, "It is Heaven's way, without distinction of persons, to keep the good perpetually supplied." Can we say that Po I [i.e. Bo Yi] and Shu Ch'i [i.e. Shu Qi] were good men or not? They clung to righteousness and were pure in their deeds, as we have seen, and yet they starved to death! Of his seventy disciples, Confucius singled out Yen Hui [i.e. Yan Hui] for praise because of his diligence in learning, yet Yen Hui was often in want. He ate without regret the poorest food, and yet suffered an untimely death. Is this the way Heaven rewards the good man? Robber Chih [i.e. Zhi] day after day killed innocent men, making mincemeat of their flesh. Cruel and willful, he gathered a band of several thousand followers who went about terrorizing the world. But in the end he lived to a great old age. For what virtue did he deserve this? The import of these examples is perfectly apparent. Even in more recent times we see that men whose deeds are immoral and who constantly violate the laws and prohibitions end their lives in luxury and wealth and their blessings pass down to their heirs without end. And there are others who carefully choose the spot where they shall place each footstep, who "speak out only when it is time to speak," who "walk on no by-paths and expand no anger on what is not upright and just," and yet, in numbers too great to be reckoned, they meet with misfortune and disaster, I find myself in much perplexity. Is this so-called "Way of Heaven" right or wrong?⁴³²

This excerpt from "The Biography of Bo Yi and Shu Qi" is sometimes cited to analyze the role of Heaven in Sima Qian's philosophy. From another perspective, the uncertainty of fame, wealth, and fate mentioned in the above excerpt actually corresponds

⁴³¹ *SJ* 61, 2124-25.

⁴³² Watson's translation. See *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 189.

with an important feature of *Shi ji*'s narratives, namely unpredictability. *Shi ji* is a history in which events are not predictable.

In order to illustrate this feature of *Shi ji*, I would like to begin with a contrasting character of *Zuo zhuan*'s narratives: the inevitability built through causation and logic of narratives. As Li Wai-yee noted, "beginnings and hidden causes are invoked in *Zuozhuan* not so much in terms of introspection but as injunctions to careful actions and calculations."⁴³³ This is achieved by manipulation of causality and consequences of events. One pattern is repeated in *Zuo zhuan*: the relation between one's virtue or morality and the outcome of an event. Whether one's behavior is in line with morality is always represented by *de* 德 in the *Zuo zhuan*.

As Bryan W. Van Norden has discussed, scholars disagree on the connotations of *de*.⁴³⁴ I think David S. Nivison's definition is the most appropriate for the context of *Zuo zhuan*. He argues that:

De is the "power" or "charisma" by which king rules without needing to resort to force or violence. *De* is also related to what Western philosophers would call "virtue."... *De* was originally this "force," which the Chinese kings acquired through their willingness to make "sacrifices" to the spirits of their ancestors, and for their subjects.⁴³⁵

In the definition above, the nature of *de* is of particular importance. One manifestation in the *Zuo zhuan* is that *de* can be acquired by being kind to others. For a

⁴³³ Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past*, 95.

⁴³⁴ Norden, "Han Fei and Confucianism: Towards a Synthesis," *Dao Companion*, 135-36.

⁴³⁵ Nivison, *The Way of Confucianism*, 5.

ruler, “others” include one’s subjects, neighbors, and so on. “Kindness” is directly related to moral codes. Another is that it is transmittable from ancestors to descendants. These features form the premises on which narratives in the *Zuo zhuan* can be constructed.

Schaberg noted that “*de*—is a term that by the early Warring States period had acquired the primary meaning of ‘virtue’ rather than ‘power’ or ‘gift’—and in so doing implies that the path to political power of the former kings enjoyed lies in moral behavior.”⁴³⁶

The usages of *de* in early philosophical and historical accounts are not exactly the same, but I think they are not necessarily incompatible. In *Zuo zhuan*, it frequently refers to one’s quality or morality. Meanwhile, it is directly connected to the outcome of events.

For example, the state of Jin was defeated by Qin at Han (yuan) 韓（原）. Lord Hui was captured by Lord Mu of Qin. The Grandee, Han Jian 韓簡, attributed this outcome to Lord Hui’s father, whose numerous inappropriate actions reduced Jin’s *de*.⁴³⁷

In addition, *li* 禮 (ritual or ritual propriety) is another frequently used term in *Zuo zhuan*. It is usually translated as “ritual” or “propriety.” Actions contrary to *li* always lead to battles and disasters as punishment. Therefore, the outcome is predictable: the side violating *li* will lose the battle and be criticized.⁴³⁸ In this sense, *li* is closely related to *de*.

⁴³⁶ Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 158.

⁴³⁷ The defeat of Jin can be attributed to several reasons. This is just one interpretation. I also discussed this battle in Chapter 1.

⁴³⁸ For related scholarship, see Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery*, 1990. Ye Yuchen, “Jiu Zuozhuan lun Chunqiu shiqi li di jiazhi quxiang yu gongtong tezheng,” 57-62. Turner, “War, Punishment, and the Law of Nature in Early Chinese Concepts of the State,” 285-324. Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 2001. Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past*, 2007.

Although they have different connotations, they are both based on morality. Indeed, the rituals are a concrete set of codes that regulate one's behavior and helps one to achieve *de*.

Shi ji is remarkably different from *Zuo zhuan* in this respect. Unlike *Zuo zhuan*, the consequences of events in *Shi ji* are not foreseeable; rather, predictability lies in the character's personalities and reactions, such as their decisions, speech, behavior, feelings, and thoughts. One typical example is Jing Ke's attempt to assassinate the King of Qin, who later united China and became the First Emperor. The plan was first proposed by Dan, the crown prince of Yan. He and Jing Ke prepared and planned carefully to secure the success of this plan. They carefully prepared for it.

The outcome was that Jing Ke failed and was killed. The king was not hurt, although he was scared for a while. Two unexpected issues happened during the assassination attempt, and they both directly impacted the outcome. One involved Jing Ke's assistant and the other, the king's doctor. To complete the extremely difficult task of assassination, Jing Ke needed an assistant. Although Dan arranged for the thirteen-year old Qin Wuyang, Jing Ke preferred an assistant who lived far away and did not join him on time. Dan misunderstood Jing Ke and guessed that Jing Ke was regretting his decision and was reluctant to go on with it. Standing on the bank of River Yi, when Dan proposed to send Qin Wuyang first, Jing Ke shouted at Dan that he was just waiting for his assistant and set off with Qin Wuyang right away. Unfortunately, Qin Wuyang was so

nervous when he came close to the King that it attracted attention of both the king and his great ministers. As a result, Qin Wuyang was not able to help Jing Ke at all after the king saw the hidden dagger in the rolled map.

The other unexpected issue happened after the king instantly stood up when he realized that Jing Ke was an assassin. According to the Qin's regulations, great ministers were not allowed to bring any weapon when they met the king in his palace. Guardians standing in the hallway with weapons were not allowed to go into the hall unless the king commanded it. As a result, there was nothing for the ministers to use to fight against Jing Ke. The king himself was the only person who had a sword inside the hall, but could not draw it out from the scabbard because it was too long. All he could do was dash around a pillar while Jing Ke chased after him. It seemed that Jing Ke had a good chance of success; however, at this important and dangerous moment, the king's doctor, named Xia Wuju, threw his medicine bag at Jing Ke so that the king got a moment to draw his sword by pushing it behind his back. This single moment totally reversed the result. The king got his sword and struck Jing Ke, who was finally wounded in eight places and killed by the king's attendants. Afterwards, the king rewarded Xia Wuju with 200 taels of gold and said "because Xia Wuju, out of love for me, hit Jing Ke with his medicine bag."⁴³⁹

In this narrative, we see the effects of accidental factors on the outcome of the well-planned assassination. The king's escape was not due to his *de*. Indeed, Ying Zheng,

⁴³⁹ *SJ* 86, 2535.

whether as the king or the First Emperor of Qin, was not even described positively in the *Shi ji*. He was not even close to matching exemplars such as Bo Yi and Shu Qi. Jing Ke, on the contrary, is characterized as a hero, although he failed in his mission to save Yan. This is a sharp contrast with the pattern of history in the *Zuo zhuan*.

It is not predictable that the King should have had difficulty of drawing out his sword, or that the doctor could have saved the king with his medicine bag. However, Dan and Jing Ke's personalities and the key causes for the failure of the assassination are. First, Dan tended to be suspicious of others, as revealed in two episodes. He talked to Tian Guang 田光 about his so called *guoshi* 國事 (national-affair) plan. When they finished talking, Dan exhorted Tian Guang not to leak it. Dan also twice doubted Jing Ke's determination to carry out the plan before he set off for Qin. The first time was after Jing Ke had committed to the plan but did not indicate that he was ready to depart. It turned out that Jing Ke was thinking about how to earn the King's trust in order to make sure that they would have a chance to meet in person, so that they could assassinate him. The second time, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Dan suspected that Jing Ke would give up the plan before setting off with Qin Wuyang, but the truth was that Jing Ke preferred to have his own friend to assist in the assassination. Losing help from a trusted and capable assistant significantly decreased the chance of success.

These episodes suggest the personalities and traits of Dan and Jing Ke, which are consistent and coherent throughout this chapter. Indeed, Jing Ke was bad at speaking and

always reluctant to explain his thoughts and communicate with others. *Shi ji* uses *weiren shenchen* 為人深沉 (“a personality tending to conceal one’s real feelings”) to describe him.⁴⁴⁰ The misunderstanding between Jing Ke and Dan, which seriously impeded the operation of the plan, is actually predictable in two short episodes at the beginning of the biography. The protagonist once engaged Gai Nie 蓋聶 in a discussion of swordsmanship in Yuci 榆次. In the course of the talk, Gai Nie got angry and glared fiercely at Jing Ke. Therefore, Jing Ke immediately withdrew. Although Gai Nie later sent a message to the house where Jing Ke stayed, Jing Ke had already left Yuci. Another time, when Jing Ke was visiting the city of Handan, he and a man called Lu Goujian got into a quarrel over a chess game. The latter grew angry and began to shout and Jing Ke then fled without a word and never came to see Lu Goujian again.

In these two examples, Jing Ke chose to be silent and leave rather than speaking to the other side in search of a solution. He had no inclination to let other people know his thoughts and resolved conflicts by walking away from them. After reading these two episodes, we are not surprised when we reach the episode in which Dan doubts his resolution and rushes him to go to Qin. This trait is predictable because it is repeated though the biography. Indeed, at the end of the text, the reader is told that Lu Goujian did not know Jing Ke’s real personality until he heard about the heroic but failed assassination. He sighed privately, “What a pity that [Jing Ke] had never deeply mastered

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 2528.

the art of swordsmanship! How blind I was to his real worth! Previously when I shouted at him in anger, he must have thought I was hardly a man!”⁴⁴¹ Although Lu’s words expressed his regret, from another perspective, they reinforce Jing Ke’s trait of concealing his real feelings. It is also to be noted that even the biography of Jing Ke in *Shi ji* overlaps with the accounts about him in the *Zhanguo ce*, the two episodes before the protagonist met Dan in *Shi ji* are not included in *Zhanguo ce*. These episodes reveal the same trait of Jing Ke: unwillingness to speak his true feelings. They are repeated elements used for attaching traits to the topic, Jing Ke, making Jing Ke’s personality predictable.

Therefore, analyzing the characterization in the *Shi ji* and other historical works allows me to interpret the vivid effects of characterization from a structural perspective. Real, complex, and theme-focused characters are achieved through inner interconnections, which are further realized by a balance between character coherence and character development. These connections, lengthening the narrative units, remove the flexibility of reading order, which in turn increases the effects of characterization.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 2538.

CONCLUSION

The introduction opened with a summary of a story in the *Han shu*, which suggested that transmitting the *Shi ji* among the princes might pose a threat to the central court, if regional lords are incited by its contents to rebel. The anxiety caused by the powerful effects of historical works is not underestimated in Chinese intellectual history. For example, in the *Mencius*, we read, “Confucius completed the *Chun qiu* and the rebellious ministers and traitors were struck with fear” (孔子成春秋而亂臣賊子懼).⁴⁴² However, how the powerful effects of *Shi ji* are produced has not been explored.

My study above, by examining various dimensions of *Shi ji*'s narrative structure, points out that *Shi ji* is a distinctive history which is more interested in *how* historical process took place than *why* and *what* happened in the past. My application of Genette's theory to the *Shi ji* is the first attempt to emancipate the text from its author. The narratological analysis of the *Shi ji* provides a new perspective and raises significant questions which have not been studied in the context of Chinese historiography.

Although the literary and historical value of *Shi ji* has been widely recognized over the past two millennia, the psychological reading of Sima Qian has been used as the main approach to interpret the text in the *Shi ji* studies, a field which has transcended the border of territory and space. Indeed, this method greatly constrains our understanding

⁴⁴² *Mencius*, *juan* 5, 118a.

and the debate over Sima's intentions and emotions does not lead us anywhere. Indeed, of its 130 chapters, 118 consist of narratives. How do the narrative devices impact the effects of *Shi ji* is an important question in historical writing, because it is closely related to how and why history is produced.

The tradition of interpreting *Shi ji* by inferring Sima Qian's intentions can be traced back to Chinese classical literary theory, which has a long practice of decoding a work according to the author's experiences and possible personal feelings. Because of the emphasis in this tradition on the intention of an author, the effects of a work and *how* they are produced have been understudied. In *Shi ji* studies, many scholars tend to select certain passages from the encyclopedic and massive work as evidence to explicate the thoughts and philosophy of the historian. It is very difficult to apply this method to the entire *Shi ji*. There is no doubt that the reception history of *Shi ji* and its scholarship in the last few centuries have many opposite conclusions and interpretations.

In fact, we may never know what Sima Qian was thinking when he composed the *Shi ji*. He might or might not have followed one principle while composing this work, which consists of more than 520,000 Chinese characters. More importantly, reading and interpreting are complicated processes influenced by various factors. Exclusive focus on Sima Qian's personal pains and emotions leads to the ignorance of the reader's role in interpretative process. Sima Qian's expectations are not necessarily as the same as the reader's responses. Even the same reader may respond differently at different stages of

his or her life. Readers use implicatures in the text to construe its meaning and the decoding of a text is heavily influenced by each reader's reading context. Therefore, different readers have different responses to the text.

The assumption that Sima Qian had a consistent philosophy implied through the *Shi ji* significantly limits the *Shi ji* studies. My examination of its scale, inclusive factors affecting historical events, diversity of characters, and the multiple distillations of message from the narrative shows that its encyclopedic features militate against any simplistic interpretative strategy and vitiate any tidy theory of history. I approached *Shi ji* in a larger context in two senses: I put it into the large picture of early Chinese historical writings and I ask a fundamental and central issue in historiography, i.e., what questions does a history answer? *Why* a historical event happened, *how* it happened, and *what* actually happened are three major issues that most histories address. Different histories answer different questions and this is closely related to the structure that they use to reconstruct the past.

In order to emancipate the text from the author, I have suggested an alternative approach, which redirects our attention from Sima Qian's intention to the structure of its narratives. To this end, I have introduced Genette's narratological theory. One obvious and important feature of *Shi ji* is that it reconstructs the past through narratives, which occupy most of its space. In this sense, it greatly differs from the form of annals employed by earlier historical writings. Furthermore, Sima Qian's creation and

application of the biographical genre gave narrative an important role in historiography for the first time. Therefore, it is worth asking how this new genre impacts the *Shi ji* and distinguishes it from *Zuo zhuan* and other earlier historical works.

Second, although it is widely acknowledged that characters and narratives in *Shi ji* are very appealing, *how* the narrative structure influences characterization is understudied. It is particularly helpful to understand the nature of characters in historical works and the special status of *Shi ji* in both literary and historiographical tradition.

Most importantly, Genette's theory provides a framework to discuss narratives in the *Shi ji* and other historical works. China has a long tradition of keeping historical records and compiling histories, but the relation between structure and effects has not been studied within a Chinese context. Comparison between *Shi ji* and both earlier and later historical works, such as *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*, sheds light on their differences and helps to delineate the practice of Chinese historiography in early China.

In short, it is impossible to be certain of Sima Qian's intentions—and even if we knew his thoughts, this still would not mean that a psychological reading, which has been the dominant mode for centuries, is the only legitimate interpretive approach. In addition, a reader's interpretation of the *Shi ji* is not determined by Sima's intention, but closely related to his or her context and individual preferences. Although classical readers and even many scholars have enjoyed inferring Sima's intentions, they are not always aware of the influence of their own reading context. Through an analysis of *Shi ji*'s narrative

devices and comparisons with earlier and later historical works, the project shows that *Shi ji* is a reconstruction consisting of narratives of great literary power.

Then, where do we go from here? This dissertation offers insights to the *Shi ji* studies and Chinese historiography in three aspects. My application of narratological theories provides a comparative perspective on the Chinese traditional interpretative practice. The extant responses to the *Shi ji* from readers, particularly scholars and literati from the Tang onwards, are rich and diverse. They are great evidence that the relationship between the text, author, and reader should be taken into account when scholars analyze literary works. Histories are selective, editable, and narrated.

In addition, the study of historical works' structure will shed light on delineating the practice of Chinese historiography. The form and structure of historical works underwent some changes which heavily impacted the effects of these histories. What questions a history can answer is an important research question in historiography and intimately connected to the structure of the text. However, this subject has not been studied in the context of Chinese historiography. While I have not been able to include much comparative work within the scope of this dissertation, such work seems a potentially fruitful direction for further study. What is the function(s) of *Zuo zhuan*? What are the function(s) of comprehensive and dynastic histories? How are their functions influenced by their structures? If functions of Chinese historical works change in the course of the past, are there corresponding phenomena in Western histories, from

Herodotus's *The Histories* to Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*?

In this study, I have emphasized the role of narrative as a medium in history. We are not able to access the past, but the reconstruction of the past in histories conveys why we should learn from the past. On the one hand, the complexity of *Shi ji* obscures a clear pattern of historical process; on the other, it attracts scholars and readers to study and appreciate it from multiple perspectives. History narrates the past just as one uses the building blocks to construct a house. The building blocks are the historical events in history. The *Shi ji* achieves its distinctive reconstruction of the past by organizing its building blocks.

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